Constructing the Identity of a Muslim Feminist

A Discursive Study of Everyday Feminism in Social Media.

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Tiivistelmä – Referat
Naisten asema islamissa on ollut jo pitkään kiistelty aihe sekä islamilaisessa teologiassa, että länsimaisessa tutkimuksessa. Aiheesta on tehty viime vuosikymmeninä paljon feminististä tutkimusta sekä feministisiä teologisia projekteja. Termi ’islamilainen feminismi’ onkin vakiintunut tarkoittamaan akateemista islamilaista feminismiä, jonka keskiössä ovat mm. Koraanin uudelleentulkinta ja historiallinen tutkimus, ja joka pyrkii parantamaan naisten asemaa yhteiskunnissa.

Pro gradu –tutkielmani keskittyy tutkimaan muslimifeminismiä ei niinkään akateemisena tutkimuksena, vaan osana muslimi-identiteettiä. Tutkimuksessani muslimifeministien identiteettien muodostumista pohditaan sosiaalisen median viitekehyksessä. Aineistona työssä toimii Twitteristä kerätty n.1500 kommentin korpus aihetunnisteella #lifeofamuslimfeminist, jonka ’twiiteissä’ kuvataan muslimifeministiksi identifioituvien erilaisia kokemuksia tasa-arvoon ja elämään liittyen. Tarkastelun kohteena on miten kirjoittajat rakentavat muslimifeministin identiteettiä käyttämällä erilaisia tulkintarepertuaareja sekä niiden mahdollistamia identiteettipositioita.

Teoreettisen ja metodologisen pohjan tälle työlle muodostavat diskurssianalyysi, diskursiivinen psykologia ja sosiolingvistiikka. Työ rakentuu vahvasti sosiaalisen konstruktionismin ajatukselle, jossa sosiaalinen maailma sekä identiteetit rakentuvat ihmisten kielenkäytössä luomien merkitysten kautta. Työssä käytetty diskursiivisen psykologian näkökulma nojaa Jonathan Potterin ja Margaret Wetherellin työhön, jonka tavoitteena on ollut tutkia miten diskursseja, tulkintarepertuaareja ja identiteettejä muodostetaan puhutussa tai kirjoitetussa kielenkäytössä. Sekä minkälaisia identiteettikategorioita tai –positioita niiden avulla luodaan ja minkälaisia niiden keskinäiset valtasuhteet ovat. Sosiolingvistiikkaa olen soveltanut Mary Bucholtzin sekä Kira Hallin viisi kohtaisen teorian osalta, jossa ihmisten identiteettien ajatellaan koostuvat monista päällekkäisistä ja muuttuvista identiteeteistä, jotka rakentuvat sosiaalisessa kanssakäymisessä. Heidän teoriansa on tarjonnut työkaluja tunnistaa ja tulkita kielelliset keinot erilaisten kategorioiden ja positioiden luomiseen.

Valitsemieni teorioiden valossa ja niiden tarjoamien työkalujen avulla olen paikantanut aineistosta yhdeksän laajempaa diskurssia, sekä viisitoista niitä rakentavaa tulkintarepertuaaria. Löytämieni diskurssien ja repertuaarien kautta aineistosta oli mahdollista paikantaa useita erilaisia identiteettipositioita, jotka jaoin kolmen suurimman identiteettikategorian alle: sukupuoli-identiteettiin liittyvät, muslimi-identiteettiin liittyvät sekä feministi-identiteettiin liittyvät repertuaarit. Repertuaareilla luotiin erilaisia identiteettipositioita liittyen kirjoittajien seksuaalisuuteen ja rooliin yhteiskunnassa, heidän uskonnolliseen identiteettiinsä ja huivin käyttöön sekä heidän toimijuuteensa ja sijaintiinsa rodullistetun feminismin suhteen. Usein kirjoittajien identiteetit rakentuivat päällekkäisesti monen eri kategorian kanssa, ja he omaksuivat aktiivisesti erilaisia repertuaareihin liittyviä väliaikaisia identiteettipositioita. Kokonaisuutena aineiston kommentit rakensivat muslimifeministien identiteettejä monella tasolla, kuitenkin ensisijaisesti naisina, muslimeina ja feministeinä, mutta myös vahvoina, koulutettuina ja suorapuheisina.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord
Islam, feminismi, diskurssianalyysi, sosiaalinen media, identiteetti.

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe
Helsingin yliopiston kirjasto, Keskustakampuksen kirjasto, Teologia

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1. Introduction and Overview

1.1. Introduction

> "How could you be a feminist? You're Muslim." #lifeofamuslimfeminist (actual thing I was told)

The role of women in Islam has been one of the most controversial subjects in the Islamic studies as well as in the Western conversation concerning the Islamic tradition. The established Orientalist view and Eurocentric framework have reduced Muslim women into romantic tales and segregated objects of subjugation. It has created an air of otherness between the West and the East, where prejudice has been the defining factor. The otherness of Muslim women has caused problems also in the Western feminist circles; in September 2017 the largest Finnish feminist Facebook group *Rento feministiryhmä* banned all posts concerning Islam and Muslims. The administrators based their decision on the fact that there weren't any Muslims in their moderation team, and the team did not have the knowledge or the time to moderate conversations concerning Islam. Additionally, they felt that the conversations were dominated by "white non-Muslims" and the opinions and voices of Muslims were disregarded.[1]

Even though western "fourth wave" feminism aims to be intersectional, it is debatable whether its inclusivity is in fact compatible with Islam. There is also a larger ongoing debate between Muslim scholars about the use of the term Islamic feminism to describe Muslim women's struggle for equality. Furthermore, western academic research on Muslim women and their position in Islamic societies has been condemned by some Muslim scholars as patronizing or to hold Orientalist aspects. These conversations provide telling examples on how difficult it is to navigate research on a field which is not only controversial but also in a way quite fragile. Additionally, they reflect the issues of using traditionally western concepts such as 'feminism' in non-western contexts, especially when the object of labelling opposes it.

The aim here is to discuss how the identities of writers who do identify themselves as Muslim feminists are constructed in the microblogging site Twitter.

[1] https://www.hs.fi/nyt/art-2000005378324.html (read 11.11.2017)

This thesis draws theoretical foundation from discursive psychology by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell as well as from a socio-linguistic theory by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall. Concepts like feminism and religion are considered here as socially constructed and the thesis takes part in a larger conversation of identity forming as social positioning of self and others. Through meticulous study of a large Twitter corpus the aim is to identify the different social constructions (=interpretative repertoires) which provide meaning to themes like gender, feminism and religion. Furthermore, with the help of these repertoires the attempt is to locate different identity positions appointed and adopted by the writers in online conversation.

The rest of the introductory chapter will present the field of research this thesis takes part in. From the study of religions to Islamic studies, it discusses the research questions as well as the research material in more detail, while contemplating some ethical questions that should be taken in to consideration when dealing with internet-based material. The second and third chapters introduce the theoretical foundation of this thesis: social constructionism which guides all other methods and tools used here, discursive psychology which is used to locate repertoires in the material, socio-linguistic identity theory which provides tools for locating identity positions, and finally an introduction to social media and Twitter. The final chapter before the analysis provides a view into history of Islam and some central gender questions that have appeared in that context. It also considers the question whether Muslim women's pursue for gender equality can or should be called Islamic feminism. The analysis chapters are divided in three main analysis categories, each of them containing discussion about the repertoires and identity positions the writers are constructing. Following a chapter which locates and summarises the dimensions of Bucholtz's and Hall's theory in the tweets. The last chapter focuses on bringing all the located discourses, repertoires and identity positions together, to conclude how the identities of Muslim feminists are constructed in the material. Additionally, it contains some reflection on how those identities compare to the Western essentialist image of a Muslim woman.

1.2 Multidisciplinary Field

Research presented in this thesis touches on several different fields of research: sociology, socio-linguistics, study of religions, Islamic studies and social media studies, to name a few. The analysis also draws from areas of feminist studies, gender studies and ethnic studies, making the field which it functions in tremendously vast. To position this work on this multidisciplinary field, it could be articulated as a discursive study of feminist and religious identity forming in the context of social media. Especially relevant to the formation of the research idea of this thesis has been the study of Islam conducted in the fields of the study of religions and sociology, and the historical studies on gender issues in Islam. The former has pointed to a shortage of studies conducted of Muslim feminists in the Finnish field of research, whereas the latter has helped to see the topic in a larger context. Since the discursive approach defines much of the research questions and conclusions this thesis presents, it is necessary to also briefly discuss discourse analysis in the context of the study of religions.

Recent years have been significant in the development and application of discursive approaches in the study of religions. First references to the use of discourse analysis in the field were made in the 1980's, but it took a couple of decades for it to gain momentum and become established as a theoretical and methodological tool in the study of religions. In the spirit of social constructionism scholars who apply discourse analysis to the study of religions consider 'religion' as "—something that is 'created' through cultural and communicational processes".[2] It has also been stated that the constructionist view and the discourse-historical approach are "--perhaps the most promising interpretative framework for the study of religions today".[3] As the discursive approaches have gained their space in the study of religions in Europe, some Finnish scholars have been quick to take part in the process of applying them to practise. Especially critical discourse analysis and its power questions have been at the focus of most recent research, but discursive approaches have been used in various contexts.[4]

The Finnish study of Islam has expanded significantly in the past two decades. Two strands of Islamic research are especially interesting in the context

[2] von Stuckrad & Wijsen 2016, 2-3.
[3] von Stuckrad 2013, 21.
[4] See for example; Pesonen 2004, Hjelm 2013 & 2005; Taira 2008 & 2010.

of this thesis: gender studies and studies that focus on Muslim identity construction. Muslim gender studies in the context of Finland have mostly been ethnographies or interviews conducted with women who have converted to Islam or with diaspora Muslims.[5] However, there is also an extensive field of Muslim gender research made by Finnish scholars, which is positioned outside the Finnish context, for example in Turkey, Yemen and Egypt.[6] On a more global scale, historical and social perspective on Islam and gender questions have been offered from several different scholars, tying women's position in Islamic societies in different secular or national events.[7] In addition, Muslim gender questions, especially the practise of veiling has been in the centre of research both in the Finnish sphere and internationally.[8]

Historical studies of women in Islam have been conducted from several different views, focusing on re-interpreting societal aspects of 18th century Cairo to re-examining the historical female companions of Prophet Muhammad. While a number of Muslim theologians have attempted to re-interpret the Qur'an and hadiths to better answer the contemporary gender questions of Islam, they have also provided feminist research in the context of Islam.[9] Some of these works are conducted with clear ideological goals, some with a goal of producing historical research that doesn't propose any anachronistic theories. What makes them so relevant is that the works of these scholars are opening conversation in areas where scholarly consensus had already been established, allowing them to present new interpretations to historical events and religious sources.

Another line of research which overlaps with the premise of this thesis is the research on Muslim identities. Finnish scholars have studied Muslim identity formation in different frameworks, often focusing on immigrant identities in Finland in a specific context such as a school environment.[10] When locating Muslim identity studies made in the context of internet or social media there are a few interesting master's theses which come up, one made with analysing politicians' blogs, one analysing a terrorist organizations internet sites, and one

[5] For ethnography see for example Tiilikainen 2003. For interviews see the master's thesis of Malmirinta 2017 and Lehtinen 2014.
[6] For Turkey see Sakaranaho 1998, for Yemen see Dahlgren 2010 and for Egypt see Al-Sharmani 2013.
[7] See for example Casanova & Cesari 2017, Moghadam 2013, Esposito & Haddad 1998, Baron & Keddie 1992.
[8] See for example, Konttori 2015 & Göle 2013.
[9] See for example: Mir-Hosseini 2015 & 2006, Sayeed 2013, Fay 2012, Barlas 2002, Wadud 1999, Mernissi 1990.
[10] See for example: Pauha 2018 & Rissanen 2014.

analysing a Muslim hip-hop site.[11] As mentioned before, the subjects interdisciplinary nature enables an extensive repertoire of approaches from politics to sociology and the study of religions.

Rising numbers of all Islamic studies have been linked to the political situation of the world and it has been argued that there is now a special need for enhanced understanding of Islam. It has also been claimed that since media portrays a homogenous, violent and fundamentalist Islam, there is a demand for academic research from various fields to produce information that could uncover the complexity of Islam and thus ease the relations of Western cultures and the Islamic world.[12]

While the field of research linked with this thesis is vast, it is still first and foremost a study of Islam and the identities of Muslim feminists. After mapping the Finnish field of research on Muslim women and Muslim identities, it is evident that there is a space for research on Islamic feminism and Muslim feminists. Recently Mulki Al-Sharmani has filled some of that void with her research on academic Islamic feminism, but it still leaves a space for the study of everyday feminism in the context of Islam.[13] This thesis works on the interface of several different disciplines and aims to position in a space between Islamic feminism as an academic subject and research on Muslim gender questions as well as their everyday lives.

1.3 Research Questions

The research material is approached here with certain presuppositions. Firstly, that it holds two major categories of identification 1) Muslim and 2) feminist, and through these categories the writers are negotiating identity positions for themselves as well as appointing different positions to others. Second, that the whole corpus of tweets is part of a larger conversation of women's rights and equality in Muslim societies. Thirdly, that the interpretative repertoires constructed in the tweets are tied to discourses outside online communication.

To understand the identity formation of Muslim feminists in social networking sites and how it connects to a larger context of equality questions in

[11] See for example: Salih 2019, Dakash 2017, Rantakallio 2011.
[12] Sakaranaho & Pauha 2016, 109
[13] See for example: Al-Sharmani 2017 & Al-Sharmani 2013.

Islam, we need to consider the following three aspects while reviewing the Twitter material:

1. How are the writers constructing the identity of a Muslim feminist?
2. What interpretative repertoires are they employing?
3. Which identity positions are made possible with those repertoires?

The aim is to draw conclusions on how the identity of a Muslim feminist is constructed in this context, also what repertoires are used in the construction and maintaining of these identities. At the same time the underlying hypothesis is that the identities constructed in this material somehow differ from the essentialist image of Muslim women and Muslim feminists.

1.4 Research Material and Ethical Questions

As a field of research, the World Wide web provides an endless feed of possible data to study and interpret. But there are also many issues that should be considered when locating research material from the internet. There are three questions in particular which should be considered when analysing this type of material: 1) how to structure and limit the vast amount of information to function as a relevant corpus of data for the research questions at hand, 2) how reliable is the data collected as research material, and 3) what ethical issues should be considered when using internet-based data?[14]

To answer the first question, it is best to present the corpus used in the analysis. This research is based on data collected from a Twitter conversation that started in January 2014, and which uses the #lifeofamuslimfeminist as the common denominator. The conversation contains thousands of tweets starting from its first post on the 10th of January 2014, going on long into September 2017. The hashtag "life of a Muslim feminist" was originally launched by a Twitter user @YxxngHippie saying:

> White fems want to pull your hijab off and 'liberate' you and Muslims tell you you don't need feminism #lifeofamuslimfeminist[15]

[14] Leppänen & al. 2017, 26-27. Kuula 2011, 135-137.
[15] All extracts used here are in their original form.

Within the first day the hashtag had been used nearly 1500 times.[16] After reading through the whole conversation from the January 10th to September 2017 it became clear that the material reached its peak during that first day of commenting and later on the comments were not adding any value to the conversation, which was not already accomplished during the first day. The data considered in this thesis constructs from those 1500 tweets which were written during the first day after the launch of the hashtag. From these ~1500 tweets approximately 1340 were left after removing the ones that were simple retweets without adding anything to the conversation. After categorising the tweets in to themes that came up in the conversation most frequently, the different repertoires started emerging and the analysis started to take its form.

Beside the vast amounts of information, the internet is also known for its fluid nature, where contents can appear and disappear quickly. Collecting the material for this thesis was made under the assumption that all the tweets of the 10th of January were available and to make sure the information would not be lost at any point, the tweets were copied and pasted into a word document which is dated and available for inspection if required. Furthermore, there is also a question of algorithms which show different users different content depending on their user history and user information shared in the separate platforms. But considering the large volume of tweets processed, it is assumed that even if some were left out due to an algorithm issue, the results of this study would not change.

The second question to ask is about the reliability of the data collected. Using material from a social media like Twitter comes with some fundamental challenges for the researcher. Unlike interview data for example, there isn't any information about the writers or speakers which would guide the analyst in some way. In face-to-face interaction there are certain observations that the interviewer can make, which the interviewee cannot deny or hide, such as assumptions of gender, ethnicity, age, social class and so on. Whereas, people using the internet can be more liberal in assigning roles for themselves since they are less likely to be questioned about them.[17] Because the writers are able to hide their identities to some extent and the participation to the conversation is completely open, some of the comments are provided by "trolls". Trolls are people who take part in different

[16] https://twitter.com/hashtag/LifeOfAMuslimFeminist?src=hash&lang=en
[17] Johnstone 2008, 195, 208-209.

social media conversations with the purpose of taunting and manoeuvring the participants to go off subject or to lose their temper. It requires understanding of how these "trolls" function to separate comments which are made in the sole purpose of provocation and hold no value for the study.[18]

Twitter demands that the users register their phone number when they open a user account. It allows the researcher to assume that behind every account there is a person connected to the real world. Since the aim here is not to assume anything of the individual identities of specific writers, it is not relevant where these writers are from or what their cultural or ethnic background is. The premise that connects the data is the use of the #lifeofamuslimfeminist. By using this hashtag, the writers identify themselves with the issues and identities of Muslim feminists.

Another thing to consider when looking at the corpus, is that the messages are all written by an elite of some sort. All the writers have access to different technologies, as well as to internet and to the Twitter platform.[19] All of them speak and write English and are clearly educated, so to say that they can represent all Muslim women or feminists in general would be to dismiss a large majority of Muslims especially from rural areas and lower classes. Thus, the objective here is not to claim that all Muslim women form certain identities but to discuss how this 'elite' who identify themselves as Muslim feminists negotiate their identities in the social media.

Ethically internet-based studies should follow the same guidelines as all other forms of research. Primarily, researchers should protect the privacy of their study subjects and they should collect only the information relevant for the study at hand.[20] Even though Twitter is a public platform it is important to be sensitive in the matter, especially when the analysis is aimed at the core of identity formation. Respecting the privacy of the writers is a key issue here as well. Even though all the comments are public, and quite easily located the extracts of the material will only provide the Twitter message without a name or a picture of the writer.

[18] Fichman 2016, 6, 173-174.
[19] Twitter has been banned in several countries during different times, including Egypt and Iran. http://www.shaheedoniran.org/english/blog/layers-of-internet-censorship-in-iran/ https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-12346929
[20] Kuula 2011, 135-137.

To conclude, the information collected from the internet is seen as a representation of real people, not in a sense that it alone would provide a reliable source from which to study individual identities, but in a sense that texts and opinions published online are a representation of the material world outside the online world. Same constructive processes happen when writing online texts, as when speaking face-to-face, thus when the goal is to study language use, internet-based material provides a relevant framework.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Tools

It is fairly challenging to organize large amounts of information and not get lost in the process. In order to form a comprehensive understanding of the data gathered, it is necessary to use different methodological and theoretical tools to make sense of the subject and construct a coherent study. Since the aim here is to produce qualitative analysis on identity formation, the methodological tool selected is discourse analysis. As discourse analysis is a tremendously vast concept, it is necessary to focus on a specific discourse analytical approach which is relevant for answering the research questions. In this study the focus is on discursive psychology, which relies on the same constructionist premises as all discourse analysis. In this chapter discourse analysis is presented on a general level through its philosophical premise of social constructionism, following these the chapter ends in a more detailed description of discursive psychology and interpretative repertoires.

2.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is not only a method of qualitative analysis, but it can also be a loose theoretical framework that can be used in a multidisciplinary field of studies. Furthermore, it is not just one approach, but in fact "a series of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies".[21] Its multi-dimensional use has made it impossible to establish a scientific consensus on how 'discourse' should be determined and how it should be analysed.[22] However, discourse analysis does not

[21] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 1.
[22] Johnstone 2008, 2-3; Potter & Wetherell 1987, 6–7; Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 1.

work with any kind of theoretical framework, but needs to be considered with certain built-in theoretical premises such as the social construction of the world.[23]

Discourse analysts approach the data to find out what has been said or written and what kind of social consequences that has. The aim is not to try and reduce the discourses as right or wrong, but to explore the patterns of speech. Discourse analysis is fundamentally an analysis of language use, where the objects of analysis are the patterns the speakers or writers construct, not their underlying meanings or beliefs. Many researchers of discourse emphasise that a discourse analysist should never aim to uncover any "hidden" truths or inner states of people, since this is well beyond what discourse analysis can reveal.[24] It has also been noted that discourse analysis is a time consuming endeavour, which requires a certain focus and resilience from the analysist.[25]

In conclusion, there are as many ways to do discourse analysis as there are researchers and the field of disciplines where it can be conducted is vast, thus making it important to first define the idea of a discourse and the method of analysis in use, before approaching the data.

2.1.1 Social Constructionist Approach

Despite the dissenting interpretations on discourse and discourse analysis, there are some methodological assumptions that hold when applying the method. First, it is agreed upon that discourse analysis relies on the social constructionist idea that by using language, people create commonly accepted social codes that are used to interact with other people.[26] These codes – or words – are not used just for communication, but they also follow and build certain patterns – discourses – that construct the social world and create the reality that we live in. Describing a phenomena is done with words, but for a simple thing there can be multiple different descriptions which imply the orientation and the interests of the speaker. Why they have chosen to use this specific description out of all available ones, is the product of the discourse as well as constructing it.[27] Some patterns become

[23] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 3-4.
[24] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 5-6, 21. Taylor 2001, 19.
[25] von Stuckrad 2013, 20.
[26] Throughout this study I use the term 'constructionism' instead of 'constructivism' as recommended by Vivien Burr to avoid misunderstandings. Burr 1995, 2.
[27] Burr 1995, 48-49. Jorgensen & Phillips, 1, 96, Taira 2016, 76.

generally accepted as the explanation for certain phenomena and are considered as 'common sense'. These patterns are called hegemonic discourses. They provide meaning systems which are understood and accepted by most people. Examples of hegemonic discourses in this study are *gender differences* discourse and *heterosexuality* discourse. The former constructs different genders as having fundamentally different traits and the latter builds a world where relationships and families construct primarily as relations between men and women. As all social constructions including hegemonic discourses are culturally specific in a way that what is considered common sense in a western society, might lose its meaning in a completely different surrounding.[28]

Discourses shape the world from a broader perspective of understanding the world, to forming identities and social relations.[29] When using discourse analysis in this sense, we need to embrace - to some extent - the philosophical thought that reality gains meaning with the use of language and that our access to it is mostly through discourse.[30] One of the major focuses of discourse analysis is the fact, that the constructed language is more than just descriptive, and that all utterances of language are used to state things and to *do* things. People use language to achieve different actions from others by requesting, persuading, accusing or ordering someone to do something. These linguistic functions are not always explicit, and their interpreting requires information on the context they were uttered in, creating a challenge on establishing a general categorisation for the analysis of speech functions and thus for the methodological instructions on discourse analysis.[31]

The second methodological assumption is that the meaning of discourses and thus the interpretation of them is always emerging from a historical context. Discourses do not exist in a void and cannot be studied without a proper framework and historical knowledge of the social world from which they arise.[32] Most often the analysed text or speech is inexplicit in its action or description and knowing the context helps the analysist to uncover the purpose of the talk. For example, to understand the context of the discourses analysed in this thesis the analyst must explore the historical aspects of Islam and the position of women in

[28] Edley 2001, 190.
[29] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 96.
[30] Jorgensen & Phillips, 8-9.
[31] Potter & Wetherell 17, 32–33.
[32] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 5; Taira 76.

Islamic cultures, as well as familiarize themselves with the context of social networking sites. Without understanding the basic questions of the conversation, it is impossible to conduct inspiring discourse analysis.

The third agreed upon premise is that discourses are considered overlapping and their established patterns variable, thus their meaning can shift and change depending on who uses them and in what context. The use of different discourses is not always intentional, people can be constructing different accounts purely based on their own experiences and feelings when trying to make sense of a certain phenomenon.[33] People also tend to use different descriptions of an individual or a concept, depending on the audience that the speech is addressed to. For example, there are rarely two identical descriptions of a specific person since the accounts are affected by the speaker's personal feelings toward that person, as well as their own experience in life and their cultural background. When describing someone for whom they have positive feelings, they tend to use very different characteristics, than someone would, who feels negatively towards that person.[34] Like Nigel Edley states: "Whatever we might say (and think) about ourselves and others as people will always be in terms of a language provided for us by history."[35]

There are some critics of social constructionism who argue that if language is building a world where everything is constantly shifting and changing, there would be no rules or regularities in anything. They claim that since discourses do not follow any strict patterns then all knowledge and social identities are entirely random, making discourses impossible to analyse. However, the social constructionists view the way in which we understand and categorize everyday life as always bound to the historical and culturally specific context. The context of the discourse determines what kind of statements are considered meaningful and what type of identities an individual can assume in that specific situation.[36] In conclusion, it can be said that the apparent uncertainty of social constructionism is in fact strictly defined by the social and historical context of the discourse. Moving a discourse to a different context can alter its meaning or construct it into something that has no, or very little, relevance to the original subject.

[33] Potter & Wetherell 1987, 34.
[34] Potter & Wetherell 1987, 33.
[35] Edley 2001, 210.
[36] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 6, 102-104

To summarise, discourse analysis leans on three commonly accepted methodological assumptions:

1) While using languages people are also constructing the world with the use of discourses.
2) Discourses cannot be analysed without the context they were uttered in.
3) Discourses are not stable constructions, and they can shift, change, and overlap depending on who uses them and in what context.

To be able to use discourse analysis as a tool in studying identity formation it is necessary to focus on one of the more specific approaches to discourse and the self, namely discursive psychology.

2.1.2 Discursive Psychology

Discursive psychology is a term which describes all forms of social psychology that build ideas of identity forming on the social constructionist idea. It emerged from the works of Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987) and it presented a new way to regard identities in contrast to the cognitive psychology view. Cognitive psychology regards language as something that pre-exists in the world and what can be used as a tool to see into people's minds and understand the complexity of their identity. It separates the individual from the society and understands and categorises the world through the individual's cognitive process, meaning that cognitive psychologists believe in a pre-existing identity which is available for a researcher to study as such.[37] Discursive psychology on the contrary suggests that while the physical world is real and contains material aspects that affect our lives, the world only gains meaning through language use and discourses. It claims that the individual is in constant interaction with the social world, where their identities, attitudes and social groups, are being formed, negotiated and reshaped, while the different cultural narratives and discourses are affecting the self.[38] In other words, discursive psychologists believe that identity formation always happens in relation to something. According to them the social constructionism of language extends over the social world to the subjective experience of an individual and their identities, and that people have several

[37] Hepburn & Wiggins 2007, 11. Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 96, 98, 102.
[38] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002 102, 108-109.

identity positions which shift and change on the influence of different discourses.[39]

The focus of analysis in all types of discursive psychology is in the question *how*, rather than *why*. How do individuals construct representations of the world and how do they establish differing accounts as false.[40] Jorgensen and Phillips separate three different strands of discursive psychology: 1) a Foucauldian perspective that leans on power relations and identifying abstract discourses, 2) a perspective that focuses on conversation analysis and language use as activities, but is not really interested in the broader context of the discourse and 3) a combining perspective that unites parts of the other two views, equally interested in what people do in their talk as well as how it ties to different discourses.[41] The research in this thesis borrows ideas from the third perspective implemented by Potter and Wetherell, by focusing on how discourses and identities are constructed in social action and how they participate in creating social positions with unequal amounts of power. This third strand of discursive psychology is equally interested in what people do with their speech as in the discourses they use. This view emphasises the action oriented nature of discursive psychology, that while people are themselves discursive subjects, they also use discourses actively as resources. This means that while identities are being constructed from outside by discourses, they are also actively constructed by the speaker herself.[42]

Discursive psychology offers a new way of conducting research in social psychology outside the established ways of surveys and psychological experiments. Instead, it focuses on naturally occurring data of talk and text as research material, but considers it also as something that is rooted in, and altering, social practises.[43] By using naturally occurring material the analysts limit the effect they have on the formation of the text being analysed, but it is also essential that they identify their own influence on the matter and realise that the conclusions made of the data in hand are always affected by the researchers own cultural, regional and social background.[44]

Discursive psychology is applied like any other qualitative approach and it

[39] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 118.
[40] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 118-119.
[41] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 104-105.
[42] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 104-106.
[43] Hepburn & Wiggins 2007, 12-13; Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 120; Potter & Wetherell 1987, 162-163.
[44] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 116-118, 119.

uses many of the same methods. The chosen material is presented with the research question, which most often focuses on "---how people, through discursive practise, create constructions of the world, groups and identities."[45] Following with the coding of the material where the text is read multiple times to identify themes that recur in the text, these themes are categorised and examined. In Wetherell's and Potter's approach the aim is to recognise and separate different discourses or 'interpretative repertoires' which people use as flexible resources in social interaction. Through them they identify how different social categories are constructed and from which discourses people draw from. For example, in their study of racism in New Zealand they identify a "culture discourse" which entails different interpretative repertoires such as "culture as heritage" and "culture as therapy". Drawing from one repertoire does not prevent from drawing on different ones at another time.[46] Switching from discourse to another also demonstrates how people can represent different identities during one interview, emphasising the fluidness of the self. To understand how the analysis is constructed it is necessary to elaborate how the concepts of 'discourse' and 'repertoire' are used in this thesis. Drawing from Wetherell and Potter, 'discourse' functions here as a tool to describe more abstract and hegemonic discourses and 'repertoire' is used to describe how the writers actively construct the world with different descriptions, which they use as flexible resources in conversation.[47]

Discursive psychology has also been subject to criticism. From the cognitivist point of view the methods of discursive psychology are lacking and do not entail techniques capable of producing scientifically accurate information in regards to repeatability. In addition, the criticism challenges the interpretations made with the tools used in discursive psychology as subjective interpretations with no means to distinguish valid and invalid results.[48] Taking into consideration its limitations, this chapter has presented the theoretical foundation to this thesis. It draws strongly from social constructionism and considers identity as a constantly shifting socially build concept, which is *being constructed* from outside by prevailing discourses as well as *constructed* by the individuals themselves.

[45] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 119,
[46] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 128-129.
[47] Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, 105-108; Potter & Wetherell 1987, 7, 156-157.
[48] Jorgenson & Phillips 2002, 132-133.

3. Constructing Identities in Social Media

While the discursive approach presented above by Wetherell and Potter offers tools for analysis on its own, I have chosen to take into consideration the critique aimed at its theoretical tools. To build a stronger foundation for my analysis I have turned to a sociocultural linguistic approach by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall. This multidisciplinary theory functions as a framework for identity construction in social sciences and humanities. Bucholtz and Hall state that there has been a need for a framework that would combine different insights from different fields "--to help scholars recognise the comprehensive toolkit already available to them for analysing identity as a centrally linguistic phenomenon." They name social psychology and discourse analysis among others as the central areas that will benefit from their theory.[49] This chapter introduces their multilevel and multidisciplinary identity formation theory before turning to the final theoretical basis of this thesis, which is identity in the social media.

3.1 Identity as Social Positioning

Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall have built their identity theory from the basis of a wide variety of multidisciplinary identity theories, including *social identity theory* in social psychology by Tajfel and Turner.[50] They separate five main aspects in the development of identity: *emergence*, *positionality*, *indexicality*, *relationality* and *partialness*.[51] In the first principle, *emergence*, they describe identity as a broad socio-cultural phenomenon and argue that identity itself is not a stable structure tied to the individual psyche, but instead it is constructed in the interaction with the world and in social interaction with other people.[52] In their words: "--identity is the social positioning of self and other".[53]

The second principle *positionality*, proposes identity as a discursive construct that is more than just a categorisation into broad social structures such as gender, age or social class, but in addition to larger demographic categories, identities have smaller cultural positions and even temporary shifting roles which

[49] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 586.
[50] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 586. See Tajfel & Turner 1979.
[51] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 607.
[52] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 587-588, 591.
[53] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 586.

can all occur simultaneously.[54] Thus, identity formation is deeply intertwined in ideological structures, such as cultural beliefs and values.

Third principle, *indexicality*, is influenced by different linguistic markers used to produce identity positions. Bucholtz and Hall argue that there are several linguistic processes that constitute identities, which include the action of stance taking. Stance or the action of stance taking as Barbara Johnstone calls it,
describes the way people use different linguistic and other methods to create and signal the propositions they are making, attitudes they are reflecting and their relationships with other people in the conversation.[55] When a specific stance taking occurs repeatedly they can form an established style of repertoire that is connected with a certain situation or social identity, such as gender. Although there has been an ongoing conversation in the academic world, whether or not aspects of social identity such as gender can be seen through language use, i.e. is there such a thing as the language of women or the language of men.[56] More often these styles propose different socio-demographic identity categories, based on dialects or other varieties, such as different social groups in schools or specific ethnic groups.[57] Another example of indexicality according to Bucholtz and Hall is codeswitching, which alongside stance taking often occurs within specific ethnic groups. Other occurrences of indexicality are specific mentioning of labels or categories, appointing different identity positions to others or to oneself, addressing different participation roles and the use of specific ideologically charged terms. They state that using varied linguistic approaches simultaneously and considering identity forming on many indexical levels, an analyst will get a more comprehensive image of how identities are constructed.[58]

In the fourth principle, *relationality*, Bucholtz and Hall draw from Tajfel & Turner's *social identity theory* and argue that when an individual takes a stance on cultural ideology or social action they position themselves to either align with a certain group or to oppose it, both actions supporting the structuring of that individual's identity.[59] They emphasize that identity is never independent, but is always in relation to other social actors and identity positions. Despite their stance

[54] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 591–592.
[55] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 594-595; Johnstone 2008, 137.
[56] Johnstone 2008, 138; for gendered language see for example, Lakoff 1975 and Bucholtz & Hall 1995.
[57] Johnstone 2008, 138.
[58] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 594, 597-598.
[59] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 598–599. Bucholz & Hall 2004, 383.

on identity forming through groups, Bucholtz and Hall see identity as a larger and more complex issue than sameness or difference to something. They believe that the features of identity are often overlapping and supporting each other, thus different aspects of identity do not exclude others.[60]

To analyse the issues of culture, power and agency behind identity formation they have established three pairs of tactics of *relationality* to examine the dimensions of identities: 1) *adequation* and *distinction*, respectively similarity and difference, where adequation is the aim to establish socially recognised sameness by suppressing the differences between individuals and groups. Distinction on the other hand is a relation where the differences between parties are emphasized rather than downplayed. Adequation is often used in political collaboration where different groups or individuals come together to achieve a united goal, but it can also be produced without solidarity, when the other group or individual asserts themselves with another identity to produce equality by force. Distinction often works on the opposite ends of the spectrum, contrasting the differences and reducing the social relation to an "us versus them" setting, but it can also be used in positioning between the two ends of the spectrum by not aligning with either, thus producing a separate identity which is still in relation to the two extremes. Through hegemonic power structures distinction can be used as a strategy of domination by the more powerful, but also as a strategy for those who wield little or no hegemonic power at all, by way of highlighting difference to the ruling group and thus resisting assimilation to it.[61]

2) *Authentication* and *denaturalization*, respectively realness and artifice, construct identities through the process of claiming authenticity with a shared language and language practises such as codeswitching or through choosing specific linguistic expressions and styles. Bucholtz and Hall explain that what is considered genuine by language users changes through discourse and emphasize that they are not giving value to the essentialist view that some aspects of identity are more authentic than others, but that the authentication process is negotiated through discourses and thus tied to linguistic and cultural history.[62] Denaturalization is the process where identity somehow violates ideological expectations or is otherwise problematic and thus seems artificial or fake. It can

[60] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 598–599
[61] Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 383–384; Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 599-600.
[62] Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 385–386; Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 601–602.

challenge essentialist assumptions concerning the commonly accepted shared characteristics or group traits of people with a specific gender, sexuality or ethnicity.[63]

3) *Authorization* and *illegitimation* construct identity through power from "the structures of institutionalized power and ideology". Authorization often draws from ideological structures that are defined by an invisible hegemonic authority, but it can also manifest in more locally based dominant structures as well. Bucholtz and Hall present an example of a nationalist discourse where language works as the binding factor between people, and where other multilingual communities need to thrive for unity by presenting one language as a uniting factor, to fit the outside defined idea of a nation. Illegitimation is the process of denying power, and like authorization it can work either to confirm or to weaken hegemonic authority. It can deny authority from languages that differ from the standard or official language, but it can also be a form of resistance towards a dominant authority by replacing the standard language with a language that is authorized in another context, such as the use of European languages in other countries, where the nationalist local language is illegitimatized by the use of the economically profitable foreign language. [64]

The last principle of their fivefold theory, *partialness*, presents an idea that all structures of identity consist of different dimensions. Some of these intentional aspects, when the individual chooses to identify with a certain feature, others habitual aspects, when the identification happens subconsciously, but also partly from the outside, when other's perceptions and representations affect an individual's identity forming. In other words everyone's identity is constructing as well as being constructed, while simultaneously being influenced by larger ideological processes and cultural structures, making identity constantly shifting while the discourses and interactions with other people develop and change form.[65]

Bucholtz and Hall state that it is problematic for a researcher to determine when a group of people should be labelled as alike and that the categorization of people to different identity categories most often gives more information about the researchers own social and identity position than it does on the subjects

[63] Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 386. Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 602–603.
[64] Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 386–387; Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 603–605.
[65] Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 605-606.

identity.[66] They also state that "when individuals decide to organize themselves into a group, they are driven not by some pre-existing and recognizable similarity but by agency and power."[67] Here that categorization is done by the writers themselves by using the shared hashtag as an identification tool. Next chapter introduces the use of hashtags as well as the social rules of social media.

3.2 Twitter and the Social Rules of Web 2.0

Even though internet as a concept was developed as early as the 1960's, it was not until the beginning of 1990's that people have increasingly been connected by the World Wide Web. The sudden growth in the numbers of internet users enabled a new view of the web, where social interaction, business and commercialization set the ground for the development of the net.[68] In the past decades internet has gone through a series of changes, one of the most influential one being the shift from allowing the user to only retrieve information, to mostly focusing on user produced material.[69] The term Web 2.0 was first used in a seminar in 1999 by Darcy DiNucci, to describe the unlimited options for mobile web devices, such as mobile phones, TV's, cars and gaming machines.[70] Later the concept of the Web 2.0 has been seen meaning different things and although a consensus on the term has not yet been formed, it has generally been thought of describing the shift mentioned above. Some critics of the term have claimed that it should not be used at all or that it describes only the commercialization of the web and the position of the internet user being used by companies and advertisers to make profit.[71] Sam Hinton and Larissa Hjorth describe it as "a philosophy of doing business in the online environment" and they claim that sometimes the Web 2.0, or in other words *social media*, can blur the line whether the user is empowered by it or being controlled by it.[72] They state that using binaries such as empowered – controlled, is often helpful in understanding the boundaries of a discussion, but they should not be used as the determining factors of the conversation. In the same way as life

[66] Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 370.
[67] Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 371.
[68] Hinton & Hjorth 2013, 8, 12; Creeber & Royston 2009, 2-4.
[69] Hinton & Hjorth 2013 8-9, 17; Creeber & Royston 2009, 3.
[70] Hinton & Hjorth 2013 16-17,
[71] Hinton & Hjorth 2013, 17, 21; Creeber & Royston 2009, 4.
[72] Hinton & Hjorth 2013 29-30.

exists in offline and in online worlds, but also on all levels in between, social media contains aspects of empowerment and control, but not only either or.[73]

Consequently, the amount of people using the internet today is astonishing. According to the website Internet World Stats, there were 4,208 billion internet users globally in June 2018[74], meaning that over half of the world's population is currently being influenced by the content of social media, providing a new fast way of interacting and sharing information with other individuals outside your own geographically based circle of acquaintances. Social media is defined here in the same lines as Seargeant and Tagg and many others as "--including any digital environment which involves interaction between participants".[75] In the context of this thesis it also works as an umbrella term to describe Social Networking Sites (SNS's) such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Instagram. These sites are internet-based platforms which are the most popular way of connecting with other internet users, since they are formed for the purpose of building and maintaining networks or communities by sharing different content such as messages, pictures, videos and links to other media.[76] Hinton and Hjorth state that "SNSs have not become popular because they create social networks, but because they provide a space for social networks to exist."[77] They continue that Social Networking Sites are claiming an integral part of peoples personal and public lives, including identity formation and politics. And that SNS's have become "the interface between people and social media --- for many the 'internet' is synonymous with SNSs".[78]

Twitter is a social networking site, developed in 2006. It provides the user with a microblogging[79] service where users can share short messages from their mobile phones or other web devices after setting up an account or profile. Twitter messages can consist of 140 characters at a time, called 'tweets' and in addition to the 140 characters these tweets can contain pictures, videos or links to other media sites. As other social networking sites, Twitter relies on community driven conversation, and offers ways for interaction from user to user by using the character @ which attached to someone else's username addresses that user

[73] Hinton & Hjorth 2013, 136-137.
[74] https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm (read 20.2.2019)
[75] Seargant & Tagg 2014, 4.
[76] Seargant & Tagg 2014, 3.
[77] Hinton & Hjorth 2013, 54.
[78] Hinton & Hjorth 2013, 32.
[79] "an online platform for posting small messages to the internet in chronological sequence" Zappavigna 2012, 1.

directly and invites that person to join the conversation. Other ways to engage and promote tweets is to 'retweet' them by using the character combination RT, retweeting is often followed by the name of the user who originally published that message and it works as a sign of a quotation.[80] Another function applied by Twitter users is the hashtag symbol (#), which marks the topic of the tweet. Hashtags entail a keyword or a topic of the tweet assigned by the user, it can be seen as the metadata of the tweet, but it can also have functional roles.[81] The content of Twitter is public unless the user defines their specific account private, but unlike some other SNS's, such as Facebook or Instagram, Twitter user has no control over who sees, or can search for their tweets, making their content accessible to anyone with internet. The possible audience of a tweet is formed solely on who may retweet it or what type of hashtags are used in the tweet itself, or in the retweets.[82] Despite the seemingly shallow way of communication where messages are only 140 characters long, Twitter has managed to claim a position as an information channel. Twitter use has been connected to different events in the world such as crisis communication and democratic uprisings. It has been named dangerous by the authorities in different countries and its use has been limited or forbidden in different parts of the world at specific times. Although the extent of Twitter's influence to political events has been debated, it is clear that it has had a role especially as a communication channel during crises.[83]

The study of electronically mediated communication and social media has evolved tremendously in a few years, moving from computer mediated communication studies, which are based on chat rooms and email-lists, to studies that focus on the new forms of internet, the social media. Simultaneously, the research in social media has expanded and become a subject of study for scholars in different fields. Social media has adopted a significant role in multitude of social aspects and events, such as politics, protests and romantic relationships. Thus, the research field has become vastly interdisciplinary broadening across social sciences and humanities, creating a challenge of forming a cohesive picture of the field.[84]

Like mentioned above, online world and communication is strongly

[80] Zappavigna 2011, 790–791
[81] Zappavigna 2011, 791-792.
[82] Halavais 2014, 37; Scott 2015, 12.
[83] Bruns & Burgess 2014, 373-375.
[84] Burgess & al. 2018, 1-2.

connected to offline reality, Hinton and Hjorth suggest that "far from developing new forms of expression that are disconnected from the real world, people's online productive behaviour is strongly anchored in real-world concerns". Online communication thus rises from real life events and ambitions and online activism aims to participate in decision making and change, even in areas where democratic participation has not been received well.[85] As activism appears and takes form in social media, so do identities. Since identity formation in social media relies mostly on written text or images instead of face-to-face interaction with gestures and facial expressions, language and discourse are the primary resources for recognising identity constructions.[86] Identity formation in social media is often seen as a public process which extends globally, because of the nature of internet. Studies also show that the public aspect of identity formation on social media is often acknowledged when people present their identities online. Seargeant and Tagg write that "—groups whose members would not normally express themselves in English do so online as a means of 'translating local cultures' and local identities to an audience with global potential".[87] In addition to identity formation, social media also forms communities of different sorts. In the context of Twitter, groups or communities built around a shared hashtag are said to share 'ambient affiliation', which ties the writers together through their participation to the conversation. A community is then created through the use of a hashtag, but other combining aspects might be lacking completely, making the communities fluid.[88]

Understanding the change in communication and the affect social media has in contemporary societies is challenging. It is not tied only to what is being said, but also to what platform and technology are being used. Clearly social media has a tremendous impact on economic, political and social aspects of the world, but it also reflects those changes, and through the understanding of social media we will gain a clearer image of the world we live in.[89] This chapter has underlined why social media platforms are interesting and justified prospects for analysis. The changing ways of communication and ways of political and social influence through the use of social media construct a new way of interacting globally.

[85] Hinton & Hjorth 2013, 75-76.
[86] Seargeant & Tagg 2014, 6.
[87] Seargeant & Tagg 2014, 7.
[88] Seargeant & Tagg 2014, 12.
[89] Hinton & Hjorth, 136, 139.

Discourses and identity positions are not only available locally, but they can be constructed universally in a matter of minutes.

4. Challenges in Defining Islam

Above, I have presented the theoretical context of my analysis, but to understand better the historical and cultural position of the conversation around the #lifeofamuslimfeminist it is necessary to introduce the main questions surrounding the concept of Islamic feminism and the role of women in Islam. As with all religions, the defining of 'Islam' is challenging and multidimensional. To consider Islam as an independent force, which is unchanging and unaltered is highly problematic. Even with Qur'an which is considered the foundation of Islam and generally accepted as the word of God by all Muslims, there are multiple different interpretations and practises depending on where the practising Muslims are in the world. To understand Islamic history, and what Islam is in different contexts, it needs to be examined from different perspectives. Chronologically listing historical events or focusing only on theological doctrines will present Islam as one-dimensional. Furthermore, focusing on purely historical documents the view will be limited to certain elite men and a few women, excluding most of the Muslim population during the centuries. One of the biggest issues regarding the study of 'Islam' are the various connotations it holds. Islam as an ideology and Islam as a religion are concepts that seem to get confused in conversation and politics. Hence it is necessary to clarify that here 'Islamic' is used to refer to religious aspects instead of ideological or political Islam.

4.1 The History of Gender Questions in Islam

Sociologist Meredith McGuire writes that traditionally women's role in most religious groups has been determined through their gender more than any other qualifications, such as their theological or spiritual knowledge. Gender defines which rituals women can take part in or what kind of roles they can have in the religious community. She traces the roles of women to an issue of power, where

women are not in charge of defining themselves religiously and socially, but it is done for them, by men who wield the power in these communities.[90]

Islam is often seen as the main explanatory factor when viewing the lives of women in Islamic societies. Through this limited view there are key subjects which are tied to the essentialist idea of Islam and which keep resurfacing in the conversation regarding Muslim women. John Esposito writes that "Few issues in Islam and Muslim culture have attracted more interest – and yet proven so susceptible to stereotyping – as issues involving women."[91] Throughout history, Muslim women have been the subject of Orientalist stories and Muslim reformers, but also a project for Western feminism to save and liberate. Muslim women have been positioned as subjugated and being the subjects to unfair social treatment with their freedom to move and work restricted by men. This Western view of Muslims has been named as Orientalism by Edward Said in the late 1970's and has been part of a larger debate ever since, concerning Western research on Muslims. It is tightly connected with the idea of Muslim women as 'the Other' in feminist research, in which the Western women and values are presented as the norm from which the Muslim women differ from.[92] Othering can occur between other identity groups as well and has occurred especially in gender research, where women are thought of as the Other to the image of men.[93] This will be discussed later on in the analysis, but first before approaching the issue of gender questions in the Muslim societies, it is necessary to discuss how the position of women in these areas has developed historically and what has influenced that development.

During the 7th century CE, Islam emerged from a number of different religious and tribal traditions. It did not take the form as we see it today during Muhammad's lifetime, nor did it happen straight after his death. The canonization of the Qur'an and the different traditions and beliefs in Islam took centuries to develop. As the contemporary Muslim population is diverse, the areas of Islamic tradition during the emerge of Islam also varied. The roots of Islamic tradition are geographically based in the Arabic peninsula and that area is widely considered the home, (and thus having had the main influence in the development) of Islam. However, there are scholars who argue, that the more prominent effect to Islamic

[90] McGuire 1997, 124.
[91] Esposito 1998, xi.
[92] Sakaranaho 1998, 29-40.
[93] For 'othering' in linguistics see Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 371.

tradition has been its spread to the more populated regions of Middle East, such as Egypt and Iran.[94]

The Qur'an was written in a time and context where it was affected by several different Arab tribal traditions and non-Arab empires that were in contact with those areas. It is still unclear how the culture changed with the emerge of Islam, since the sources describing the areas where Islam had developed are all written decades or even centuries later by Muslims. This gives some scholars reason to suggest that the sources now in use to describe the times before Islam's emerge do not actually show the situation as it was, but as the Muslims wanted to present it to show how Islam had improved the quality of life, in order to spread the Islamic tradition.[95] Despite the unreliability of the sources, it can be interpreted that the canonization of the Qur'an, brought some changes concerning women and their rights. Esposito writes that "The tribal societies of pre-Islamic Arabia were in every sense of the term patriarchal societies–", women did not have rights as we see them today, but their roles were strictly limited to being wives and mothers. After the Quranic reform female infanticide was forbidden, women were granted rights to inherit and to own property, and some security was provided to widows and orphans, which they had not had before.[96]

While it is clear, that some changes in Arab tribal societies happened during the early years of Islam, it does not mean that these changes happened equally in all areas – geographical or social. The changes applied mostly to women living in urban upper-class families, where for example inheritance and endowment were more prominent. This left a large group of Muslim women in lower social classes and rural areas in a different position. Same restrictions faced women also regarding religious practise and education. While the Qur'an encourages and demands the same religious participation from men and women, historically women's access to religious education and public prayer spaces has been restricted.[97] In conclusion, it can be said that even though Quranic reform provided new possibilities for women, all of the religious sources in Islam were still interpreted by religious scholars, who were men. Thus, different readings

[94] Berkey 2003, 39, 57, 60.
[95] Berkey 2003, 58–60. Baron & Keddie 1992, 4.
[96] Esposito 1998, xii.
[97] Esposito 1998, xiii.

could be made depending on the culture of those men, affecting the ways women were treated in different parts of the Islamic world.[98]

For the West the portrayal of the role of women in the Middle East was long depending on European travel literature. These writings had a tremendous effect in the notion Westerners had on Islam and Muslims. However, it is criticized that as a historical source they provide a more accurate description on European views on gender than they do of the Muslim communities and the realities of life in the Middle East at the time.[99] Nevertheless, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and through colonialism, the West made an impact to the Muslim world. Different approaches to try and liberate the Arab and Muslim communities from

under Western power entailed more conservative approaches as well as an effort to forge an Islam that would be compatible with modern beliefs such as science and technology, but also respectful to Western values of family, education and employment of women. This sparked a series of changes for some Muslim women in the form of educational and employment opportunities and voting rights. While certain areas and upper social classes were once again benefiting from the reform, other specifically rural areas, were left unaffected.[100]

While there are many aspects of gender questions in Islam, such as polygamy and family law, veiling is often the main focus when looking at the western discussion of gender questions in Islam. Turkish sociologist Nilüfer Göle states that "no other symbol than the veil reconstructs with such force the "otherness" of Islam to the West.". She claims that the custom of veiling holds many opposing relations such as the "power relations between Islam and West, modernity and tradition, secularism and religion, as well as between men and women and women themselves".[101] From the Western view, wearing a veil or a headscarf is considered as restricting a woman's freedom, and it is a visible sign of subjugation that is deeply intertwined with the image of Islam and Muslims. Thus, veiling has been used as a tool for separation to divide "us" from "them" since the colonization period and has been strongly connected to cultural differences for centuries.

[98] Esposito 1998, xii.
[99] Roded 2008, 9. El-Sohl & Mabro 1994, 4.
[100] Esposito 1998, xiv–xv.
[101] Göle 2013, 1.

To add perspective to the conversation it is important to point out that the style of women's clothing varies greatly between Muslims around the world and it should be remembered that majority of Muslims do not live in the Arabic areas of Islamic history where veiling is most common.[102] Despite this, the veil has become a tool for political battles. Göle writes that "--veiling is a discursive symbol that is instrumental in conveying political meanings". What is significant here is that she separates 'veiling' as "wearing of a head covering and long, loose-fitting gowns" and the "traditional Muslim woman's use of the headscarf" as another.[103] Veiling for Göle then means an Islamist reintroduced custom, which is aimed at the West to form a deeper political separation. In the context of this thesis veiling means all forms of headscarves and dresses which are used to construct a Muslim identity for the wearer. Anne Sofie Roald claims that "Muslim feminists and western researchers see the Islamic veil in terms of oppression and male domination, but Islamist men and women view the veil as a symbol of dignity, honour and distinction."[104] While her statement may be accurate for some, the analysis and results presented in this thesis differ from her conclusions in many aspects. Before contemplating the analysis it is necessary to introduce the concept of Islamic feminism and the controversial conversation that surrounds it.

4.2 The Controversy of Islamic Feminism

Calling Islamic feminism a controversy may present to different audiences in different ways. Often when talking about Islamic feminism outside an academic or Muslim framework (and sometimes even in them), the first response is an exclamation that there is no such thing as feminism in Islam. While it is clearly not the case, it continues to be the essential Western, and often also a Muslim, notion that feminism and Islam are not compatible. However, like Camillia Fawzi El-Sohl and Judy Mabro point out: "Muslim women's lives and the choices they face are influenced as much by patriarchal social arrangements as they are by religious ideology".[105] Thus, making feminism as much a part of their lives as their religion is, the question just lies in defining it to suit the diverse settings of

[102] Hallenberg 1998, 63.
[103] Göle 2013, 1.
[104] Roald 2001, 299.
[105] El-Sohl & Mabro 1994, 1.

Muslim women.

Margot Badran argues that "the West is not the patrimonial home of feminisms from which all feminisms derive and against which they must be measured." She continues that Middle Eastern feminisms are not borrowed from the West, but originated and developed in the Middle East. Furthermore, Middle Eastern feminisms intersect with other feminisms in the world and they draw from each other "in agreement and disagreement".[106] Badran separates two existing feminisms in the Middle East areas as secular feminism and Islamic feminism. She claims that the secular feminist movement formed at the end of the nineteenth century with the arrival of new information technology such as the printing press and an increase in literacy among upper and middle class women. This led to the formation of a feminist discourse constructed by urban women where women addressed topics of gender from their own standpoint. By the end of twentieth century significant social and economic changes had occurred, which increased educational opportunities for Muslim women and activated them to start forming women's organizations in order to drive forward religious, educational and social reforms.[107] According to Badran this led to a new feminist discourse in the Middle East. Badran ties the emergence of this new discourse to the political situation in Middle Eastern countries and to the rise of Islamism and claims that it appeared first in the countries that have longest been influenced by Islamist ideology such as Egypt and Iran. The Islamist thinking drove conservative ideals that would limit women's participation to homes, thus limiting their access to education and employment. It instigated a movement among educated women to produce a more progressive Islamic voice, which has been named Islamic feminism. Badran points out that both of the turning points in feminist activism were influenced by the development of new information technology, which enabled the formation of feminism, this time in the form of the World Wide Web.[108]

According to Badran, the two feminisms have "appeared mainly in Muslim-majority societies with plural religions and/or multiple ethnicities." She writes that even though they are separated as two, secular feminism is in fact multiple different feminisms which draw from distinctly different discourses: such as nationalist, Islamic modernist, humanitarian and democratic discourse. In this

[106] Badran 2005, 12-13.
[107] Esposito 1998, xv.
[108] Badran 2005, 6–10

sense the nationalist discourse holds for example Egyptian feminism and Iranian feminism and so on. Contrary to the secular feminisms Islamic feminism draws from a single religious discourse which is based on the Qur'an.[109] Badran explains that Islamic feminism or feminism in Islam provided new tools for the feminist discourse to approach the inequality of genders in Middle Eastern countries, by "--grounding its assertions in new readings of the Qur'an".[110] She notes that the term Islamic feminism has not been adopted by Middle Eastern feminists themselves but has been appointed to them from the outside, especially by other Muslims. Badran also claims that the colonialist idea that Muslims are incapable of producing feminism is still argued in the Western context. She writes that "Islamic feminists (still most often declining the label) are at once intellectuals and activists –" and continues that they are engaged in a gender jihad (struggle) whose ultimate goal is complete equality.

The increasing feminist movement has raised a lot of questions concerning the Muslim history, and like Badran argued above there are some scholars who still feel that 'feminism' as a concept doesn't really have a place in the Arab tradition. Leila Ahmed for example, states that the Western colonialists introduced the term 'feminism' to Arab societies in order to emphasise their own superiority compared to the people in Arab and Muslim societies. It was used to show how the colonialized societies oppressed their women and thus were lesser in their ethnic and national abilities than their Western conquerors. Furthermore, some scholars claim that the concept of 'feminism' has not had an equivalent in the Middle Eastern languages, and that Muslim women find it challenging to adopt a western model of feminism because of the different views of women's liberation. It has been argued that whereas Western feminists see religion as a problem and the liberation of women has revolved around equal wages, the modern Muslim feminists refuse to adopt western values and lifestyles and see religion as a fundamental part of their feminist identity.[111]

Quite opposite to Margot Badran's view, Fatima Seedat writers about the problems that arise when converging concepts of Islam and feminism into *Islamic feminism.* She presents four different positions adopted by scholars linked in the pursuit of "sex equality in Islam": 1) a position, which believes Islam and

[109] Badran 2005, 6, 12.
[110] Badran 2005, 12-13
[111] Ahmed 1992, 149–158; El-Sohl & Mabro 1994, 17; Karam 2011, 8.

feminism should be kept separate in conversation. It holds the idea that feminism is not suited with Islam either because feminism is seen through a very narrow lens or because Islam is seen as fundamentally patriarchal and thus not suitable for feminism. 2) Merging Islam and feminism into *Islamic feminism* and claiming that it is necessary to do so in order to advance the goals of Muslim women (Seedat positions Badran in this category). 3) Challenging the presentation of Islam and feminism together as well as the label feminist. In this position, the focus is on resisting third-wave feminism and its hegemonic feminist discourses. Seedat emphasises that while third-wave feminism focuses on taking in consideration all women in all societies, it does so while being a normative standard from which all others differ, thus increasing alterity instead of dissolving it. 4) "Taking Islam for granted", meaning a historical base and a discourse which entails a notion that equality between genders has always existed in Islam, but it has not been named feminism and should not be limited by the tools that feminism as a hegemonic concept provides.[112]

Seedat firmly states that the concept of *Islamic feminism* builds the western narrative where Islam is seen as patriarchal and restricting women's rights, and where the West is the saviour of Muslim women by providing them the notion of feminism so that they can be liberated. She continues that putting aside the semantics that feminism provides, the problem lies in the positioning in "--the pre-existing discursive frameworks that insist on claiming all struggles for sex equality in the framework of feminism."[113]

While the debate between scholars like Badran and Seedat gives insight to the problematic nature of the term Islamic feminism, some of the studies acknowledge this problem and choose to work between it. El-Solh and Mabro write that "the diversity of contexts within which Muslim women live out their lives thus supports -- (the) view that women's position in Muslim societies can neither be read off solely from Islamic ideology and practise, nor from universalistic premises of feminist theory."[114] They claim that issues between secular and Islamic feminism rise mostly from the fact that they are building the discourses of their feminisms from different standing points and call it the "dialogue of the deaf", where neither side can see through the others eyes.[115]

[112] Seedat 2013, 30-39.
[113] Seedat 2013, 43.
[114] El-Sohl & Mabro 1994, 13–14.
[115] El-Sohl & Mabro 1994, 17-18.

In conclusion, it can be said that the field of feminism in Islam is highly controversial and from the point of view of Muslim scholars, Islamic Feminism is fundamentally an academic project. Acknowledging this debate and because of linguistic reasons the writers in the analysis are spoken as 'Muslim feminists' and even though some of the writers might be a part of academic Islamic feminist projects, the consensus here is that these writers represent those who Badran calls "secular" Muslim feminists.

Even though the separation to Western feminism seems to have been the consensus for Muslim women for the past decades, it is necessary to bring the conversation to today. In the recent years Western feminism has been going through another shift in its focus and although debatable, a new wave of feminism has emerged. This 'fourth wave' of feminism has been linked to the growing influence of internet and especially social media. It is described as follows by Ealasaid Munro:

> Many commentators argue that the internet itself has enabled a shift from 'third-wave' to 'fourth-wave' feminism. What is certain is that the internet has created a 'call-out' culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged. --- With more and more young feminists turning to the internet, it is imperative that academics consider the effects that new technologies are having on feminist debate and activism.[116]

Whether it should be named fourth wave feminism or not, it is clear that even Muslim feminists have taken to promoting their cause in the internet. Contemporary feminists are adopting new forms of influence and while the terminology is still under debate, the new form of feminism is global in a way that feminism has not been before. With the emphasis on intersectionality, the potential of fourth wave feminism is in promoting the agency of marginalised women, much like the writers in this Twitter data have done.

5. Analysis

The analysis is constructed around three social identity categories, which form a basis for identity forming in the material:

1. Gender identity - this chapter discusses how the writers produce gender distinctions and what type of gender discourse they are building with the use of interpretative repertoires.

[116] Munro 2013, 23.

2. Muslim identity - the focus here is what kind of religious identity the writers are building and how that identity is formed to adapt with their other identity positions.
3. Feminist identity - in the last chapter the focus is on how their feminist identity is constructed in relation to other feminist ideologies and to their religious identity.

The aim here is to gain insight on the construction of the self, the world and the Other in the tweets. To accomplish this, larger discourses are revealed by discussing the interpretative repertoires, which construct them. By studying how these repertoires are build it is possible to see where the writers position themselves in the conversation, consciously or unconsciously. In other words, it is necessary to identify larger structures of the social world to see how smaller structures such as identities are formed.

The material here is considered to represent the identity of a Muslim feminist. While the number of writers and tweets is vast, it is not the aim to recognise factual descriptions of individual writers, but to consider the tweets as a representation of everyday religion in the context of a social networking site. This work also holds the idea that the vast network of social practise in the internet provides an effective environment for identity construction in relation to others. Furthermore, the assumption here is that the social world in the internet correlates with the social world outside of social networking sites, and that the social constructions formed in social networks like Twitter are transmitted to the material world and vice versa.

5.1 Gender Identity

The idea of gender as a social construct started to gain momentum in the 1960's when the renewed feminist movement in the West, later named as second wave feminism, began to focus on the idea of women as the subordinate sex. Femininity had been long seen as something that differentiated from the standard of a man, and thus had been presented as weaker, passive and submissive compared to the set model of a man. The concept of gender has had different focal points in studies during the years, reaching from personal attributes of femininity to hierarchical power relations in societies, and even to redefining the concept of masculinity

with recognising the diversity of masculinity as well as femininity.[117] One of the most repeated discourses globally concerning gender has been the *gender differences* discourse, which constructs two genders, men and women, to fundamentality differ from each other.[118] This discourse can be seen as a hegemonic discourse, which entails and overlaps many of the gender repertoires.[119]

As Bucholtz and Hall present, all forms of identity as well as all discursive concepts are relational, meaning that they all are created and gain meaning in interaction and in contrast of other concepts and identities. Earlier I introduced the main aspects of relationality, which were respectively: similarity & difference, realness & artifice and authorization & illegitimation through power. Analysis of gender discourses often leans on the first relation of sameness and difference, where masculinity is seen as the opposite of femininity and identities are defined negatively, through the aspect of how we as women are different from men, the Other. This can happen with other groups as well, as long as there is an Other to compare to.[120] In this material and through the analysis the Others that are building the femininity of the writers are both male and female, but also larger concepts such as the Muslim community or society.

While religion has historically often been the basis of defining gender roles it has also been the source of the legitimation of these roles. The ideal roles of maleness and femaleness have been drawn from different scriptures, religious symbols and religious images throughout history and the development of gender as a culturally established concept often acknowledges religious impact on these roles. McGuire suggests that what is socially accepted as the woman's role in different groups, will become a part of an individual woman's identity and that it reflects on the way she sees and valuates herself in comparison to others, thus creating a society where unequal socially build gender roles are being held up by both sexes.[121]

[117] Segal 2010, 323-324, 328
[118] Sunderland 2004, 52
[119] Sunderland 2004, 69.
[120] Edley & Wetherell 2007, 314; Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 383-386; Bucholtz & Hall 2005, 601-605.
[121] McGuire 1997, 121-122

5.1.1 A Woman's Place

There are multiple repertoires in the material that seem to build on the *gender differences* discourse by positioning women and men differently in a society. Quite often these repertoires link in the general themes of education and employment, but almost as often they lean on an idea that there is an essential image of femininity and thus a certain way that women should behave, speak and act. Here I contemplate on two overlapping repertoires found in the tweets regarding the themes mentioned above.

One of the most prominent repertoires in this data is the *women as homemakers* repertoire, it entails a notion that a woman's place is at home with the children while men work and function as providers. It also includes the idea that education is not necessary since it is only required if one wishes to pursue a career outside the home. Below the writers demonstrate not only how this repertoire is build but also how they are taking a stance opposing it and thus creating an 'us versus them' separation:

> 1) the outrage of Muslim men who tell me that I should stay at home and look after family instead of academia/politics #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 2) Being told that college is a waste of money cuz it's not like you'll actually work after you're married. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In extract 1 the writer is simultaneously constructing the *women as homemakers* repertoire where it is assumed that women "stay at home and look after family", and deconstructing it by stating that it is an "outrage" that Muslim men "tell me" what to do. She is taking a stance against the three main assumptions that this repertoire entails, firstly the idea that Muslim men would be in a position to make decisions for Muslim women, secondly that a Muslim woman's place is at home and thirdly that education is not necessary for Muslim women because of their position in the society. The writer in extract 2 adopts the same stance by stating that she is "being told that college is a waste of money" because she is not expected to work after she is married. In contrast to extract 1 where Muslim men were the ones doing the telling, here the attempt to control comes from a more generic passive voice, in the context it can be interpreted as either Muslim men, the Muslim community or another Other outside the writers Muslim community. Here too, the assumption is that once they are married Muslim women will not work outside the home, and it is also expressed that since they are staying at home there is no need for education. Opposing the *women as homemakers* repertoire the

writers are constructing their own group, which is positioned outside the essentialist idea of women within Islamic societies.

Looking closer at the *women as homemakers* repertoire it is evident that it draws from a hegemonic *heterosexuality* discourse. In other words, the repertoire holds a view that relationships are strongly between men and women, and that marriage functions as a bond between these two sexes. In addition, it proposes that attaining a good husband is a personal accomplishment and in a way the ultimate goal for Muslim women:

> 3) Being told you can't move out the house till you're married. #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 4) Because every sister's goal in life should be to please men and get married. #lifeofamuslimfeminist"

The writer in extract 3 states that she is told that she "can't move out" until "you're married", this strengthens the idea that Muslim women are not supposed to be independent, but live in their childhood home until they find a husband who will be the next provider for them. Since in this repertoire women are not expected to work or be academics their livelihood is exclusively dependent first on their families or fathers and then on their husbands. Extract 4 supports this with the description of "every sister's" goal in life is "to please men and get married". Pleasing men can be thought of as pleasing their fathers and then their husbands, while being a wife remains their only goal in life. Both of the writers are resisting the repertoire by using expression like "being told" and "should be", implying that what is suggested would not be their own goal or plan. While they do not directly voice their preference of living or marriage plans, it can be interpreted from the context that they are criticising the assumptions and decision made for them by others. Whether it be their own family like in extract 3 or in a more general level like in extract 4, but that they don't necessarily oppose marriage itself.

Women as homemakers strengthens the conception that Muslim women are not a part of society as academics or contributing members of work force, but as wives and mothers. It is worth noticing that this repertoire is not specific to Muslims or tied to any geographical cultural positions, and it can be recognised on a global scale in majority of societies. Often the *women as homemakers* view is strengthened by women as well as men, and it leans on a larger *natural* discourse, where taking care of children is considered physically and emotionally a woman's

job.[122] By resisting the assimilation to established gender repertoires, the writers are strengthening their own group identity by taking a stance against imposed gender roles and constructing their own social group as separate from other groups and the expected roles they maintain. Thus, they are structuring their own identities in ways which violate these ideological expectations.

In addition to the *women as homemakers* repertoire mentioned above, there is a specific repertoire that proposes certain features to women, this repertoire is labelled here as the *ideal woman* repertoire. It entails a notion that there are defined traits, which women should possess in order to fit the category of an ideal woman, like being attractive, modest and passive. These examples are demonstrated below:

> 5) Being told you're "not marriage material" because you're too opinionated and straightforward. #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 6) Being told too much education is unattractive. Good. I hope I'm not attracting ego crazy bums. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

This repertoire overlaps somewhat with the above presented repertoire *of women as homemakers*, but it provides the conversation a deeper focus on the expected personality traits of Muslim women. In extract 5 the writer states that she possesses features that make her "not marriage material", this overlaps with the previous repertoire as it suggests that marriage is a goal, which should be attained by ideal Muslim women. In the act of opposing the expectations of an *ideal woman* the writer is choosing to construct her identity in labels such as "opinionated" and "straightforward". Simultaneously building her own group and the identity of a Muslim feminist as such.

In extract 6 the writer states that "being told too much education is unattractive", there are two things that can be interpreted through this statement: first that it should be a Muslim woman's aim to be attractive and second that education is not considered as an attractive trait. This relates to the *women as homemakers* as well, since education is not seen as a part of Muslim woman's identity, because their role is at home with the family. It also constructs yet again the educated identity of a Muslim feminist, while resisting the *ideal woman* actively. Although in extract 6 the writer does not mention labels like opinionated or straightforward specifically, like in extract 5, the statement still holds both

[122] Wetherell & al 2007, 204-207.

labels by using bold and assertive language. She writes that she hopes that she is "not attracting ego crazy bums", which in turn labels her as having "too much education". In *ideal woman* education is seen as not only unnecessary but also as an unwanted feature, and while opposing the repertoire the writers are building a strong connection between education and the identity of a Muslim feminist.

Another feature not suitable for a Muslim woman in the *ideal woman* repertoire is feminism. Much like education it is described as a negative influence on a woman's character:

> 7) Being told i'll never get married because having feminist ideals automatically means i'll treat my husband badly LOL #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 8) Being told you're emotionally unstable because you're passionate about feminism. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In the extracts above "feminist ideals" and "passionate about feminism" are seen as traits not suitable for *ideal woman*. Having feminist interests means that marriage is not suited for those women because it means that they will treat their husbands "badly", but also because they are "emotionally unstable". Extract 7 also overlaps with the *women as homemakers* repertoire, with "i'll never get married" implying that marriage is something to aspire to. In addition, there is a recurring passive phrase in these extracts of "being told", which appears in *women as homemakers* and *ideal woman* repertoires more often than in others. The phrase implies that when it comes to gender questions the identity of a Muslim woman is often attempted to be defined by others.

While the writers separate themselves from the *ideal woman* they are also constructing their feminist identity, which is on one hand linked with gender in tweet 7 and on the other with labels such as "passionate" like in tweet 8. Both of these aspects are tied to the general essentialist image of feminism, which is often described as a political movement of passionate women. Looking at the ways these women describe the expectations of the outside world concerning their character, there is a specific image being built that reappears throughout the whole corpus and through which the women define themselves in their own terms. The main presumption seems to be that Muslim women should be subordinate, quiet and passive. Instead of adapting to the proposed role of the demure Muslim woman, the writers are presenting a different identity, where feminism enables them to be opinionated, straightforward and passionate.

5.1.2 Sexuality

Almost all of the tweets are strengthening a *heterosexuality* discourse, by presenting relationships to happen between men and women. Inside this discourse there are number of repertoires that are being used to construct the sexuality of the writers. Most of the repertoires can be interpreted as empowering Muslim women and once again breaking some broadly accepted norms. By openly conversing about sex, menstruation and divorce, the writers are breaking a taboo of female sexuality. The most common repertoire regarding sexuality in the material is the *wife or whore* repertoire. It entails the assumption that women are positioned in a binary where they are placed in one of two roles: a wife - a demure woman whose sexuality belongs to her husband or a whore – who is unmarried, promiscuous and damaged. The role of a wife also contains women and girls who are not yet married, but thrive to be wives and who will remain virgins until their wedding night. Functioning inside the discourses of *heterosexuality* and *gender differences*, the repertoire emphasises that the expectations of sexual purity only apply to women:

> 9) A woman having casual sex is WORSE than racism, misogyny, domestic violence, forced marriage, homophobia, backchat #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In extract 9 the writer states that “a woman having casual sex is WORSE” than multitude of social problems like racism and homophobia. She effectively builds the *wife or whore* repertoire by underscoring that the ability to have casual sex is reserved only to men, and women behaving in a similar fashion are the shame of society. The same notion continues in extracts 10 and 11, in addition, the writers bring up the unequal position of women and men especially regarding dating, marriage and divorce. The tweets below demonstrate well the problematic position of women in this repertoire:

> 10) Lol can I have a 'past' too? And it not ruin my chances of marriage? Oh it's only for the brothers you say #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 11) after divorce a guy is treated w/sympathy while sister is forever labelled "damaged goods" #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In extract 10 the writer expresses that women are not allowed to have “a past”, because it would “ruin my chances of marriage”. Here she constructs the *wife or whore* repertoire by strengthening the idea that the most substantial role a woman can have is the role of a wife and that role comes with an expectation of virginity.

The right to have a sexual past before marriage is reserved only for "the brothers", and with use of "you say" and "brothers" it can be interpreted that these rules are stated by the fictional Muslim society. While she clearly criticises these rules with expressions like "lol"[123] and "oh", she also places herself outside of the category of a wife, thus ending up in the other of the two categories, the promiscuous category of the whore.

Extract 11 continues along the same lines as extract 10 with stating that "guys" and "sisters" are treated differently "after divorce". The writer builds the *wife or whore* repertoire with the idea that when a woman is married she is accepted by society, but once she gets divorced her position in that society shifts. With this shift, she does not suit the label of a *wife* any longer, since she is neither a virgin nor married, and is automatically placed in the *whore* category. Tweets above present well the dualism that the repertoire holds, to be accepted in the society women must be either wives or virgins. Sexually active women outside of marriage, either before or after, are not approved and a woman after a divorce is considered "damaged goods". This type of repertoire has been recognised in other contexts before and it has been claimed to entail an idea of a dangerous female sexuality, which men find threatening and which can in turn produce irrational jealousy in them. Furthermore, it has been said that in order to respond to the insecurity female sexuality stirs among men, they have felt the need to control it by subjugating women in different ways.[124]

While the writers are constructing the *wife or whore* repertoire, they are also negotiating identity positions with the use of labels such as "sisters" and "brothers". While it is common in Muslim communities to refer to fellow Muslim women as sisters and Muslim men as brothers, according to Barbara Johnson choosing certain forms of address is always also a strategic move in some way. The choice of form is often used to manage social relationships, either by creating one or strengthening or changing an already existing one.[125] Throughout this data the writers use multiple different forms of address, one of the most interesting ones being the use of "brothers" and "sisters" as either aligning or opposing. Often the communal aspect is emphasized with these terms, when the writer points out that they are all part of the same community, but sometimes the

[123] Internet slang for "laughing out loud".
[124] Sunderland 2004, 59.
[125] Johnstone 2008, 140.

individual values of its members are not in line with each other. Intimate forms of address such as sister or brother also create an air of familiarity between the writer and the community they have chosen to identify with and evens out the differences between the members of that group. In addition, to the forms of address, the writers are constructing a temporary identity position of an equality promoter by emphasising and opposing the different moral expectations of men and women.

Another reoccurring repertoire concerning sexuality is the *sexual inequality* repertoire, which leans on the idea that men have a stronger sexual urge that is in their biological nature and which they cannot control. In other contexts it has been called the 'male sexual drive' discourse, which holds a strong connection with the privilege men have over women to be promiscuous.[126] Here it is rather named as *sexual inequality* repertoire, because in addition to building male sexuality as overpowering it also constructs female sexuality in different ways. Refraining from sexual encounters outside of marriage is presented earlier to only apply to women, while men are free to do as they please. In the next tweets, sexual behaviour and sexual power are constructed as unequal in several ways:

> 12) Having a man tell me that my eyes are "too attractive." Me telling a man to lower his effing gaze. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

'The male sexual drive' discourse which is here named as the *sexual inequality* repertoire sometimes works as an explanatory factor when regarding men's affairs outside of marriage or even in the context of rape where the perpetrator claims the victim contributed to the assault by flirting with him until the point of no return.[127] In extract 12, the writer demonstrates the *sexual inequality* in two ways, first she states that "a man" tells her that her eyes are "too attractive", giving the impression that it is her fault if men make advances towards her because she is too attractive and men cannot help themselves. Again emphasising the strong male sexual desire, which is not in their control and thus they cannot be blamed if something happens. Secondly the response that she gives that the man should "lower his effing gaze" is related to the Quranic verse 24:30, which depending slightly on the translation tells "the believing men that they should lower their gaze".[128] Lowering the gaze has been used to counter demands for more covering

[126] Sunderland 2004, 58
[127] Sunderland 2004, 58
[128] http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=24&verse=30

dress styles for women and it could be interpreted as such here as well. Since the "man" describes only her eyes as too attractive, instead of her face, hair or body, it could be interpreted that she is somewhat covered already. Moving the attention to her eyes as being too much of a temptation the expression can mean that from the man's view she is not covered enough. Emphasising the unequal sexual power relations between Muslim men and women, the demand for stricter covering of women rises from the *sexual inequality* repertoire. Constructing the male sexuality as empowering and the female sexuality as fragile or dangerous, leaves the women seemingly responsible for their sexual safety with their choice of dress.

While the lowering of the gaze is relevant in constructing the *sexual inequality* repertoire, there are other aspects to the repertoire as well that do not entail the veiling of women. In the next tweet, the writer describes sexual power relations inside a marriage:

> 13) Being told it's not rape if your husband forces himself on you because you have to 'give it up' #lifeofamuslimfeminist

Here the sexuality of the husband is described as "forces himself" and the sexuality of the wife as "give it up". Again male sexuality is described as dominant and female sexuality as weaker, thus strengthening the repertoire. By "being told it's not rape" the writer states that it is accepted on some level that a husband has a right to have sexual relations with his wife whether she agrees to it or not. Building the *sexual inequality* repertoire the writer is simultaneously adopting a role of a woman who is sexually weaker, but also gaining a position of power by breaking the taboo of talking about sex and rape. *Sexual inequality* repertoire comes together as being fundamentally a repertoire of gender power relations. It leans strongly on the *gender differences* discourse as well as the *heterosexuality* discourse, and it treats domestic violence as natural, since men are naturally more powerful and potent.

The last repertoire building the sexual identity of Muslim feminists is the *sexuality as taboo* repertoire. Like seen above, sexuality in the tweets is often presented as something that the writers should feel embarrassed about, and it is described as a private matter or something that is not discussed with men, even when confronted. It links quite often with the idea presented in the *wife or whore*

repertoire that female sexuality needs to be controlled by men in some way. Here the writers construct the repertoire through religious practise and menstruation:

> 14) #lifeofamuslimfeminist telling the guy that asks you why you're not praying that blood is flowing through your vagina instead of shying away
>
> 15) #lifeofamuslimfeminist being told I am NOT ALLOWED to pray while on my periods! #itsexemptnotforbidden

Above both of the writers indicate that they are restricted from praying while menstruating and both of the extracts construct men as controlling women: in extract 14, the emphasis is on "telling the guy that asks" and "instead of shying away", which are used to imply that speaking about menstruation to men is not normally done. The writer then expresses her stance by stating that "blood is flowing through your vagina", discarding the socially accepted behavioural norms and topics. Writer in extract 15 states that "being told I am NOT ALLOWED to pray while on my periods", which could be interpreted on its own as supporting prayer during menstruation. However, with the use of #itsexemptnotforbidden, she implies that praying while menstruating is not forbidden in Islam, but women are liberated from that duty during that time. Thus turning the controlling aspect of "not allowed" as something positive her religion offers her. In extract 14, a "guy that asks" why the writer is not praying implies that it is in his right to monitor and control the praying of others, similarly to "being told" in extract 15. While both of the writers have accepted that during their menstruation praying is not practised, they still position against the people who attempt to place these rules on them, positioning themselves against the patriarchal Muslim community, while simultaneously accepting religious norms.

Both of the tweets are simultaneously constructing the *sexuality as taboo* as they are liberating the conversation in the sense that they are constructing an environment where it is accepted to speak about 'vagina' and 'periods'. While all these writers are participating in building the sexuality repertoires, they are also presenting themselves and their sexuality in a certain way. Functioning inside the discourses of *gender differences* and *heterosexuality,* they are actively challenging the dualism of women as wives or whores, by claiming that sexual freedom and standards should apply to both sexes, men and women. In addition, they are challenging the *sexual inequality* repertoire by adopting a position of an object of sexual harassment, while simultaneously gathering power by naming the injustices that they face and effectively breaking sexual taboos.

To help position the numerous repertoires found in the data they are presented along the analysis in three different charts which are organized by identity themes. From left to right there are: the identity themes, the larger often hegemonic discourses that affect the repertoires and finally the repertoires introduced in the analysis. The first chart shows the repertoires constructing the gendered identities of Muslim feminists:

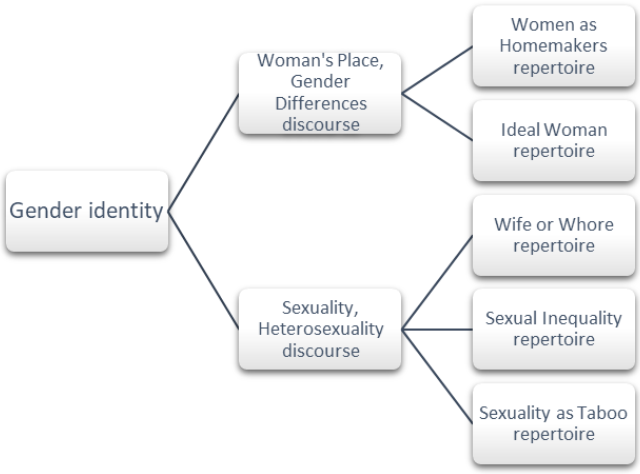

Chart 1. Gender identity.

Here the repertoires are divided under two categories; repertoires that construct the womanhood of Muslim feminists and repertoires that construct their sexuality. While all five gender repertoires overlap, they also make possible certain identity positions for the writers. *Women as homemakers* and *ideal woman* construct Muslim feminists first and foremost as women. While they both rely on hegemonic gender discouses they enable numerous smaller identity categories for Muslim feminists such as educated, academics, wives and career oriented, but also as opionated, straighforward and passionate. Sexuality repertoires strengthen the positions which the *women as homemakers* and *ideal woman* have made possible. The stance which the writers have taken against the *wife or whore* repertoire constructs their sexual identity as liberal and modern, which the *sexual inequality* repertoire strenghtens. Additionally it enables the writers to adopt certain identity positions such as a rape victim or a divorceé. *Sexuality as taboo* continues along the same lines, allowing the writers to construct their sexual identity as natural and liberal. In the sexuality repertoires groups that the writers separate from are labelled as “men”, “guys”, “Muslim men” and “brothers”, and while in these

repertoires labelling is used actively, in the other gender repertoires labelling is not used as often. The most recurring expression in them is "being told", which allows the writers to take a stance against the repertoire without naming specific groups.

5.2 Muslim Identity

In sociology of religion, scholars have established that while social groups have a significant impact on how an individual's worldview is formed, religious meaning systems are also a notable influence on how that individual interprets different events and experiences. These meaning systems also provide meaning to the individuals' identities and to the existence of the group that they belong to. Especially participation to shared rituals is thought of as strengthening the unity and identity of the group.[129] Furthermore, religious identity can also be used as a tool to respond to conflicts within religious groups as well as conflicts between groups.[130] However, as other identity aspects presented here, religious identity is also considered as socially constructed and constantly shifting.[131] Similarly, as religion is seen as a social meaning system, being a Muslim is considered a social position adopted by individuals who structure their world according to the same meaning system. Still, it does not mean that the identity of a Muslim is static or that it is identical in all settings, or that it cannot be contradictory to other identity positions that person constructs.

McGuire suggests that through the different roles men and women have in religions their religious experience is also fundamentally different, even though it is shaped by the same larger religious group. Historically women's influence in the formation of religions has been smaller than of men's, thus the religious power relations have favoured men. Leading to a situation where "--gender is far more important than theological or spiritual qualifications in determining whether an individual can perform certain rituals--".[132] McGuire writes that, "In many religious groups, women are pressing for changes in rituals and symbols in order to reflect their experiences as women and to change the images of women held by

[129] McGuire 1997, 36, 48, 52.
[130] Werbner 2010, 233.
[131] McGuire 1997, 53.
[132] McGuire 1997, 121–123.

the whole group."[133] She also claims that while religion is an undeniable source of power, it competes with other powerful concepts such as sexuality. Meaning that by using religious power to control sexual power, the group that holds the religious power maintains their own power position.[134]

Considering what is mentioned above and in the previous chapter, it is clear that sometimes religious identities can be in conflict with other identity positions. In the case of Islam, it is often women who find themselves negotiating their religious identity with their femaleness. Here that identity is constructed through repertoires, which legitimate it from religious sources and history, as well as through certain linguistic practises, which work to build a unified Muslim identity.

5.2.1 The Perfect Islam

Negotiating Muslim identities in the material is generally done through building a discourse of *perfect Islam*. Instead of distancing themselves from religious aspects with criticizing their position in Muslim societies, the writers are constructing their own interpretation of Islam. One that leans on the idea that there is a purest form of Islam that existed before the influence of men. This discourse named here as the *perfect Islam*, is used repeatedly in the tweets when legitimating the Muslim feminist cause. In the discourse, Islam is seen in its purest form as a power that is free from secular and mundane aspects such as inequality, feminism or patriarchy, but on the other hand, Islam and the Qur'an are both seen as tainted with human influence such as culture, Muslims and men. The writers repeatedly highlight the importance of interpreting the Qur'an correctly to liberate Islam from these harmful influences. This constructs the first repertoire, which builds the discourse of *perfect Islam*, the *Quranic rights* repertoire:

> 16) Muslim women don't get their strength from men, western/eastern laws or cultural norms. #Quran = #beingfree #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 17) You mention all the rights the Qu'ran gives to women&are immediately met with "but what about *insert culture here*!" #lifeofamuslimfeminist

Focusing on the source, which all Muslims recognise as the word of God, the writers are using a form of *authorization* to legitimize their positions as Muslims.

[133] McGuire 1997, 127.
[134] McGuire 1997, 129.

By drawing from a hegemonic authority whose authenticity cannot be repudiated by other Muslims, they are similarly obtaining power and taking a stance against the claim that Muslim feminists are not "real" Muslims. The writer in tweet 16 describes Muslim women getting their strength from the Qur'an. She denounces all Muslim women from mundane powers such as "cultural norms", "western/eastern laws" and "men", and emphasis the freedom the Qur'an gives her. The *Quranic rights* repertoire constructs Qur'an as the main legitimizer when constructing the identity of Muslim women. In extract 17, the writer continues to construct this repertoire with "all the rights the Qu'ran gives to women", by way of emphasizing that there are rights for Muslim women in Islam, but they are not a product of culture or men. She further separates Islam and "culture" with stating that when talking about the rights Muslim women have, they are often questioned with different cultural inequalities. Within the *Quranic rights* repertoire Islam and culture are often seen as separate, which allows the writers to construct their religiousness as the fundamental aspect in their identities. While it would be problematic to align with Islam if it would be thought of through the customs of Islamic countries for example, aligning with it through the *Quranic rights* repertoire allows the writers to construct their identities as authentically Muslim and thus unproblematic.

The *Quranic rights* repertoire is also used to separate from other Muslims. By drawing a difference between "me" and "other" Muslims the Quranic rights are given only to the writers own group:

> 18) How I choose to interpret the Qur'an for MYSELF is no ones business but mine. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In this extract, the writer claims that her interpretation of the Qur'an is her personal "business", implying that the Qur'an is free to interpret by anyone as they wish. While there is a deeper theological conversation attached to the debate of Quranic interpretation it is not the goal here to take part in it.[135] Instead, it is possible to draw conclusions about the writer's position regarding the repertoire. Placing herself in the *Quranic rights* repertoire as a free agent, who draws power and justification to her being and identity from the Qur'an, she is constructing her identity as a Muslim in two ways. First, as writers before, she too is separating her religious identity from any secular laws, and secondly, she separates also from the

[135] For the debate see for example Al-Sharmani 2016.

influence of Muslim community, creating a deeply personal Muslim identity, which could be seen as protecting the writer from any critique towards her practise as a Muslim.

In addition to drawing from the Quranic rights repertoire the discourse of perfect Islam draws also from historical validation. The foundation of this repertoire is in the early years of Islam, more specifically in the times of Prophet Muhammad and his followers. This *education* repertoire leans on the premise that Muslims need to have better knowledge of their history in order to understand and appreciate the role Muslim women have in Islam:

> 19) Teaching Muslim men about the Muslim women who built Islamic history from its 1st day. Literally. #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 20) Women are NOT weak or less than men. The stories of the Prophet's time prove that again and again. #LifeOfAMuslimFeminist #knowyourhistory

In both of the extracts the writers are adopting a temporary role of a teacher, this allows them to seemingly shift the power balance between Muslim men and Muslim women in their favour. By being the ones who hold the knowledge of historical events and how they are correctly interpreted they construct the equality question in Islam as a question of education. The writer in extract 19 claims to teach "Muslim men about the Muslim women who built Islamic history" and ends her statement with an affirming "Literally", suggesting that Muslim men are ignorant to historical facts which prove that female participation in Islam has been greater than they have known. The same type of repertoire is constructed in the second extract where the writer claims that there is abundant historical evidence in early Islam, which proves that there is equality between men and women in Islam "again and again". She as well adopts an educational position by using "#knowyourhistory" as a sign that knowledge of the history of Islam provides all the necessary arguments for the conversation. The *educational* repertoire recurs in the tweets often and it entails the notion that the writers as Muslim feminists hold information, which legitimizes their cause with a historical continuum. Their identities as Muslims are repeated and authenticated by women, who shared their lives with Prophet Muhammad, thus using the other important source of Islam, the example of the Prophet, as an authority to prove that the roots of Islam are equal. The *educational* repertoire strengthens the *perfect Islam* discourse with the idea that "real Islam" was built with the efforts of women from the Prophets time.

The third and last repertoire constructing the perfect Islam discourse is the *cultural Islam* repertoire. It holds the notion that besides *perfect Islam*, which while being perfect is also equal, there is also a *cultural Islam*, which entails all the aspects that the writers do not want to affiliate their religion with. The cultural Islam repertoire allows the writers to explain inequalities and problematic concepts in Islam as cultural, and thus corrupted:

> 21) 'You have Islam you don't need feminism.' That's true, what we lack is Muslim men implementing Islam correctly #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 22) If Muslims lived as Muslims should there'd be no need for #lifeofamuslimfeminist don't confuse #culture with #religion

The *cultural Islam* repertoire functions as a tool, which the writers use to construct other rival repertoires, like inequality in Islam, as false. It helps them to position themselves as Muslims and authenticates their faith in constructing the *perfect Islam* discourse through the idea that there is a cultural Islam, which entails all the problematic traits Islam is claimed to have. The two extracts above show how the *cultural Islam* repertoire rejects the need for secular ideologies like feminism. In extract 21, the writer answers to an exemplary statement about needing feminism in Islam by claiming that it is the "Muslim men implementing Islam" who are the reason why Muslim women ("we") need feminism. She also creates differentiation with positioning Muslim feminists as "we" and "Muslim men" as the Other. Where as the writer in extract 22 sets the separation between "Muslims" and "Muslims", implying that there is a code of behaviour and practise in Islam, which when implemented correctly would remove the need for feminism.

5.2.2 Veiling as a Religious Symbol?

As discussed before, the custom of veiling has been and is a complex phenomenon. Despite the numerous motives for wearing a veil, in the context of Islam it is a visible sign of a religious identity. Perhaps because it is the most prominent sign of religious identity of Muslim women and it has been so widely discussed in Muslim and Western circles, it appears also here repeatedly. There are multiple overlapping and competing repertoires of the veil in the material, but they all seem to share a common feature: they all emphasise the personal nature of the choice whether to wear a veil or not.

There are three different repertoires that are discussed here: a *pious* repertoire, a *diversion* repertoire and a *divergence* repertoire. The first constructs the act of veiling as a deeply religious choice and a straight connection to Allah, the second constructs veiling as a *diversion* that should not be a topic of conversation regarding Muslim women and equality, and the last repertoire of *divergence* builds women as active agents no matter what they choose to wear.

The *pious* repertoire engages in the larger context of Islamic jurisprudence mentioned earlier, involving the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadiths. Like other veiling repertoires, it is also constructed with separation, mostly the Other which they separate from are described as men or Muslim men. In this repertoire, the choice to wear a veil is tied to the religious context where a modest Muslim seeks Allah's approval by covering herself. The veils are worn only for God, not for anyone else. The importance of the veil is considered through the religious experience, and as a personally meaningful religious symbol:

> 23) Wearing hijab has nothing to do with men. It is about being modest to please God. I don't need to defend it. #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 24) Being a niqabi doesn't make me your precious diamond. It makes me a Muslim seeking Allah's Pleasure,no more, no less. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

The writer in extract 23 constructs the pious repertoire by stating that wearing a hijab[136] "is about being modest to please God". She constructs the wearing of a veil as an act of modesty, which is at the heart of her religious identity. By stating her reasons to wear a hijab and claiming that "I don't need to defend it" she actually assumes an apologetic position. The writer separates herself from the people that question the use of veil as well as from "men". In extract 23 the act of veiling is described as a deep personal connection with God, and thus it expresses profound religiousness.

Similarly in tweet 24 veiling is described as a search for a connection with Allah. She also denounces a connection with men, by stating that wearing a niqab or "being a niqabi" will not make her "your precious diamond". The diamond rhetoric is often used when Muslim men aim to justify dress codes for women, it

[136] Hijab (or حجاب in Arabic) roughly translates to English as 'cover', 'curtain' or 'veil', it is also the word used to mean a headscarf, which leaves the face uncovered. Niqab (نقاب) also translates as 'veil', but in the context of dressing customs means a long covering gown which leaves only the eyes exposed. Most of the comments mentioning a specific type of veil name a hijab, it is named in the material approximately 120 times, where as a niqab is discussed only on 14 separate occasions.

entails the idea that a woman is so rare and precious that she needs to be hidden away from other men so they would not feel tempted to steal her. Building her religious identity as choosing to wear a niqab to please her God, the writer is effectively constructing a repertoire where veiling is seen as a natural part of being a pious Muslim woman. In addition, this part of their religiousness is not tied to the community, men or cultural aspects, but is fundamentally a personal choice.

The second repertoire concerning veiling is the *diversion* repertoire. At the core of this repertoire, lies the notion that the discussion of veiling is being used to distract the conversation from matters of real importance:

> 25) Wishing that people would stop talking about my hijab/niqab so that *I* can talk about what REALLY matters to me. #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 26) being a Muslimah doesn't begin and end with hijab. Stop the obsessions over the minature to avoid the major #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 27) if as a community we discuss hijab styles more than incidents of rape, domestic violence etc, we're failing our deen. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In this repertoire the conversation about veiling is considered to divert the attention from real feminist matters. In extract 25 this is expressed with the emphasis on "people" talking about veiling and not listening to the writer and "what REALLY matters". The writer also suggests that the conversation about the veil is done intentionally to avoid more pressing topics, thus it is thought to be a diversion from "real" aspects of the lives of Muslim women. The writer in tweet 26 also criticises the conversations focus on hijabs, she describes them as "miniature" and claims that there are other "major" aspects that are being avoided with the "obsession" to hijabs. The *diversion* repertoire constructs veiling and hijabs as irrelevant to the conversation of Muslim feminists and women, but also builds a stronger unified identity for Muslim feminists.

In extract 27 the writer states that "as a community---we're failing our deen", by focusing on "hijab styles more than incidents of rape, domestic violence etc.". With the use of an Arabic word like deen (دين = religion) and the pronoun "we", the writer is constructing a unified Muslim identity. By mixing Arabic words with English text the writer is practising codeswitching, which according to Bucholtz and Hall, is used to authenticate identities as genuine and it is often linked in the historical context of the used language. In the Twitter material here, Arabic words such as masjid (مسجد = mosque), haram (حرم = forbidden), deen (

دين= religion) and ummah (امة = Muslim community) are used to let the writers construct their own in-group as Muslims. Arabic is considered the language of Islamic tradition, since it is the original language of the Qur'an, and with the choice of codeswitching these writers present a completely different dimension to an all English conversation. Studies have shown that also in the online world language choice is closely connected to identity positions and it lets the writers adopt different identities in different situations.[137] Twitter as a platform provides a type of elite setting with a choice of anonymity where messages can be read by anyone, but by using Arabic words and expressions these writers aim their message to other Muslims and people in similar social roles as themselves, creating a sense of unity between the speakers. Aiming the message to her in-group and thus emphasizing the communal identity of Muslims, she is authenticating her claim via the use of Arabic. Thus, her statement about hijabs and the role that they should play in Muslim discussion is build on a notion of shared identity and a position of concern about her fellow Muslims.

In addition to diverting the attention to less relevant matters, the *diversion* repertoire opposes the essentialist idea, which assumes that Muslim women are defined by the veil. Interestingly the resistance is not aimed only at Western dialogue but to Muslims as well. It criticizes the assumption that there is a unified identity which all veiled Muslim women share, but also the idea that intelligence and faith are in straight correlation to a woman's dress:

> 28) Reducing our ENTIRE faith, identity, intellect to a piece of cloth on our heads. #bothmuslimsandnonmuslims #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 29) Assuming that there is a certain personality that covered girls have by default is irrational #lifeofamuslimfeminist

As a way of separating from the importance of the veil the comments that construct this repertoire often create distance by using terms like "piece of cloth" or "covered girls" instead of mentioning hijabs or niqabs. Here the writers criticise the reductionist idea that the veil provides a set identity to all women who wear it, and that this identity is the expected identity of a Muslim woman. This repertoire overlaps with the earlier discussed *ideal woman* repertoire in that they both build certain expectations to these women, which they actively resist. In the diversion repertoire the act of veiling is not seen as problematic, on the contrary,

[137] See for example; Lee 2017.

most of the writers construct their identities as well as strengthen their belonging to the group of Muslim women by using pronouns such as “our heads” and “my hijab” identifying with the group of Muslim women who wear the veil. It differs from the pious repertoire in that it does not construct veiling with a deeply religious meaning. Instead, it is seen as a natural, unproblematic and a personal choice for the writers. While they strongly criticise the essentialist image of veiled women, the act of veiling itself is not challenged.

Donning the veil has been presented as an individual choice, and Bucholtz and Hall state that sometimes minority groups can use separation as a strategy to increase their social power. Here separation is created from the hegemonic feminist West as well as the dominant Muslim community, by stating that the choice to wear the veil is deeply personal. Thus, they are not wearing the veil because their community tells them to, but they are not submitting to the Western demand of unveiling either, by emphasising freedom of choice the writers are claiming power for themselves. Even when the writers themselves indicate that they are not using a hijab, they still support other Muslim women who do. Even in the *diversion* repertoire the hijab itself is not opposed, it is seen as an integral part of Islam even though its relevance to the conversation of feminism is debated in the tweets. In other words it is unifying the writers as Muslims and women, but not as feminists.

Previous repertoires have been building veiling as a normative concept, even though a personal choice, but still as something majority of Muslim women do. The last repertoire constructs the subject from a different angle:

> 30) Being told you are naked [BY A STRANGER] because you don't wear hijab. #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 31) Being judged just because I don't wear a hijab by those who do. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

This repertoire is constructed through the experiences of women who do not don the veil, it is named here as the *divergence* repertoire. It entails the notion that not wearing a veil is seen as abnormal, this abnormality is then openly questioned and criticised by the surrounding community. In tweet number 30 the writer tells that she has been criticised by strangers that “you are naked” only “because you don’t wear hijab”. Again the expression is “being told”, implying that the criticism might come from the same Others than in the gender repertoires: Muslim men and

Muslim community. In tweet 31 the judgment comes from “those who do -- wear a hijab”, indicating that the critique is coming from other Muslim women.

The *divergence* repertoire differs from the other two repertoires mentioned above in that it breaks the unified position the writers are constructing. In *pious* and *diversion* repertoires the writers strengthen the unified common identity of Muslim women as wearing a veil. The *divergence* repertoire on the other hand constructs the question of the veil as more complex than a unified Muslim women’s stance against the West and Muslim men. Here the critique towards not veiling comes also from the inside. It is not only Muslim men or the West that try to control Muslim women’s dress, but it comes from their in-group of Muslim women as well. Thus, the *divergence* repertoire positions the writers as outsiders, and conflicts with the other two repertoires, which build the act of veiling as a personal or a religious choice.

To conclude, this chart demonstrates the different repertoires that are building the writers Muslim identities:

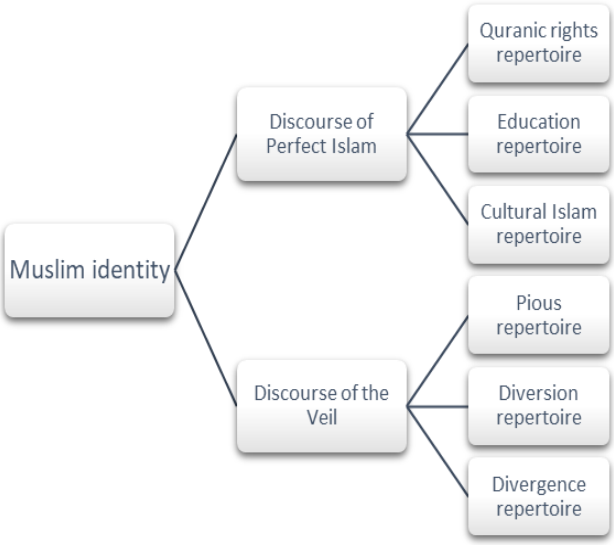

Chart 2. Muslim identity.

The repertoires are divided in two categories: the three first ones construct the discourse of the perfect Islam and the other three the discourse of the veil. The *quranic rights* repertoire along with *education* and *cultural Islam* repertoires allow the writers to position themselves as separate from “other Muslims” and cultural aspects of Muslim communities and take a stance against them. They are constructing their position as Muslim feminists as “real Muslims”, teachers and

free agents. Separation in the perfect Islam repertoires is done through labelling "men", "Muslim men" and "other Muslims".

The three veiling repertoires are all used to construct agency for the writers. The position of a free agent is adopted in all three, the *pious* repertoire adding a strong religious position. *Pious* repertoire along with the *diversion* repertoire both construct the veil as a part of a Muslim woman's identity, thus enabling a fundamentally religious identity position and the construction of a unified Muslim feminist identity as veiled women. This unity is then broken by the *divergence* repertoire which allows the writers to position as outsiders and it also draws separation between Muslim women by dividing them in to "those who wear the hijab" and those who don't. In addition, separation is drawn to "men" and "people", but often also through passive voice, while unity is created with labels like "Muslim", "Muslimah" and "community".

5.3 Feminist Identity

Feminist studies and feminist activism has had a tremendous impact on especially social identity studies. At the core of feminist identity formation is the idea that the world we live in is a gendered world. [138] Identifying as a feminist is always a step on an area where one subjects herself to criticism. Often people construct negative stereotypes associated with feminism, while dismissing the egalitarian goals and drive for social change feminism entails. Several studies have shown that feminist identity is often linked to social activism, regardless of the ethnicity of the feminist, even though feminism has been seen as the movement of Western middle class White women.[139] Feminist identity is often adopted in numerous ways and for different reasons, but like studies show, there are also people who do support feminist values but do not identify as feminists. They also show that while holding the same ideological values of feminism, the people who do identify themselves as feminists are also more active in practising feminist activism and as other identity positions the development of feminist identity is also a multidimensional process without any fixed aspects.[140]

[138] Elliott 2011, xv.
[139] Frederick 2018, 263-264.
[140] Frederick 2018, 275.

The formation of the writers' feminist identities is discussed here from two angles according to how it is presented in the data. First the focus is on feminism as a racialized category with specific racial repertoires of *white feminism* and *coloured feminism*, and secondly the positions of the writers as agents is questioned in the *victim* repertoire and their position between two powers is contemplated in the *agency* repertoire.

5.3.1 Racialized feminism

Race and ethnicity are concepts in research that are constantly changing due to the difficulties of defining them. Because of the heavy history of racism and racial discrimination, scholars in especially Europe work to avoid the term 'race' and the act of racialisation, and often use the term ethnicity instead. Since the material here carries some different racialisations, which are recurring and thus relevant for the understanding of the research results, this chapter focuses on discussing them.

The aim here is not to discuss whether 'race' exists, but to demonstrate how racialization is used in the material to construct identities through Othering. The racialized Others that the writers mostly construct in their repertoires are 'white' and 'whiteness'. Often in conversations about race 'whiteness' has been seen as the point from which everything else differs from, quite similarly as masculinity in the conversation regarding gender. Only recently and through the conversation focus shifting from 'race' to 'ethnicity', has 'whiteness' been considered a focus of study.[141] In these studies 'whiteness' is often seen as the process with which 'white people' gain and use social dominance, and which is used to explain social inequalities.[142]

In the material here, the writers are actively constructing a repertoire of *white feminism*, which differs from their own feminism fundamentally. This repertoire draws from colonialist and orientalist discourses, which provide a historical framework for the construction of the repertoire. *White feminism* is constructed as a power position with questionable ideological values of colonialism:

> 32) Being hesitant to criticize something because you don't want white feminists to think you're cosigning their bs. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

[141] Phoenix 2010, 313.
[142] Levine-Rasky 2002, 2.

> 33) No solidarity in fighting the cultural patriarchy in Islam because white fems just ignore our history of feminism #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In extract 32, the writer builds the position of a white feminist as overly critical and states that criticising things in Muslim feminist lives needs to be done with consideration, because white feminists might think "you're cosigning their bs" (bs=bullshit). In tweet 33, the writer claims that there is "no solidarity" and that white feminists "ignore our history of feminism". Drawing from the colonialist discourse the writer is constructing *white feminism* as separate from her own feminism because of white feminists' historical ignorance. The history of white feminism and the history of the Muslim feminist writers is separated and white feminism is positioned as an outside force, which is not interested in the cause of Muslim feminists, but drives only its own goals. Through the construction of *white feminism* the writers are creating unity in their own group. "Fighting the cultural patriarchy" and "criticising something" is not done with the help of white feminism, but instead only in their own group of Muslim feminists.

Throughout the material, the writers create a strong separation to white feminism and besides 'men' it is also the label used most often to describe the Other for Muslim feminists. The writers have turned the expected controversy of trying to fit Islam with feminism, into a controversy of fitting Western feminism with Muslim matters. In the *white feminist* repertoire the identity position the writers repeatedly build is constructed in relation to the white feminists ignorance and their false expectation that they are in a position to 'save' Muslim women. This is elaborated further in the *victim* repertoire.

White feminism and separation from it is not the only racialization made in the tweets. Another racialized repertoire in the material is the *coloured feminism* repertoire; it reflects the issues people of colour face inside the Muslim feminist cause. The repertoire these writers are building is suggesting that when racialized, the features of a Muslim feminist are not black:

> 34) Constantly feeling like you're talking to white feminist when discussing race issues with other Muslim W. #lifeofamuslimfeminist #blackwomen

> 35) #lifeofamuslimfeminist feeling invisible and marginalized as a woc in the feminist movement and as a Black Woman among Muslim fem discourse

As demonstrated before, skin colour and cultural affiliation is repeatedly seen as a mark of separation between Muslims and the rest of the world. In the *coloured*

feminism repertoire, this separation extends to the group of Muslim feminists. Extract 34 emphasises the difficulty Black Muslim feminists face when "discussing race issues with other Muslim W.", this expression constructs the racial difficulties that are present in the Muslim feminist cause and inside Muslim communities. The writer compares other Muslim women to white feminists when it comes to race issues, overlapping in the *white feminism* repertoire and positioning *coloured feminism* and thus herself in a linear line where white feminism and coloured feminism are at the opposite ends of a spectrum and "other Muslim women" in between them.

The writer in extract 35 continues the same line of positioning, she feels "invisible and marginalized as a woc (woman of colour) in the feminist movement" but simultaneously also "as a Black Woman among Muslim fem discourse". She constructs the *coloured feminism* repertoire as a marginal group in a marginal group, by stating that she feels left out in the feminist movement in general as well as in the Muslim feminist group. The identity of a Muslim feminist is thus constructed as neither White nor Black in the *coloured feminism* repertoire. The writers identity as a Muslim feminist is built as problematic and racialized. Because she labels herself as a "woc" and a "Black Woman", her racialized identity is in conflict with her Muslim feminist identity. Much like *white feminism* repertoire problematizes the identities of White Muslim feminists.

The *coloured feminism* repertoire appears in the tweets in less evident forms as well. In the conversation about skin bleaching as a "cultural" phenomenon, it presents as overlapping with the *ideal woman* and *women as homemakers* repertoires:

> 36) Challenging the beauty norms & practices within your culture such as skin bleaching & favouritism of light skin #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 37) Hate how some Muslim parents put emphasis on skin color in order to be a pretty wife. No to marriage, no to bleaching #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In these tweets, the practise of skin bleaching is seen as a product of the writers own culture. It is promoted by "Muslim parents" or "your culture" and it is practised "in order to be a pretty wife" or as a "beauty norm". Through the act of skin bleaching the *coloured feminism* repertoire is affected by larger discourses of colonialization and power. Ronald E. Hall describes the custom of skin whitening as "the bleaching syndrome" resulting from colonialization. He claims that it is the result of an attempt to assimilate with the ideals of the Eurocentric West and

that skin bleaching is fundamentally a question of power. Imitating the image of a Westerner, people of colour are aspiring to gain the same standard of living as them. He points out that the process is psychologically harmful and it promotes a view where skin colour is linked to inferiority, but because of the power setting between West and the rest of the world, people of colour are not able to negotiate their position and instead adopt this repressive practise even though they might recognise it as harmful. Hall also claims that if the power positions were not there, the concept of skin bleaching would not exist.[143] These tweets about skin whitening are also constructing the identities of Muslim feminists as not White, while strengthening the *coloured feminism* repertoire. Through extracts 36 and 37, it is evident that "your culture" and "Muslim parents" who favour this practise are not predominantly White, nor are they Western, constructing Muslim feminism as coloured and also deepening the separation to *white feminism.*

As stated before both of the repertoires *white feminism* and *coloured feminism* are constructed through layers of historical discourses and power relations between West and the rest of the world. Negotiating identity positions in these repertoires are done through recognising the hegemonic discourses and taking a stance against them, either by naming the injustice or drawing a distinct separation to it. *White feminism* and *coloured feminism* work as tools for the writers to construct their own feminist identity on one hand as separate from whiteness and on the other as intersectional and taking a stance against racial segregation.

5.3.2 Agents and Victims

There are scholars who claim that the distinction between the West as modern and civilized and Arab world, or the Orient, as the barbaric and backward is constructing a discourse of women as either *agents or victims*. In this discourse agency[144] is given to women who thrive for secular and liberal freedom and the role of a victim is placed on the women who do not fit the Western secular ideals. This entails the assumptions that local cultures and beliefs are working against Muslim women's agency. In addition, they argue that there is a need to "go

[143] R.Hall 2013, 3-4.
[144] Meant here in a sense that agency is "--the capability of an agent/actor to act upon the circumstances where the agent/actor is embedded and thereby to effect (prospective) change in them." Pyysiäinen 2011, 30.

beyond dichotomous discourses regarding women's experiences".[145] Here that discourse is considered, with a few alterations, as the foundation of two repertoires: *victim* and *agency*. *Victim* repertoire builds Muslim feminists as subjugated and segregated, where as *agency* repertoire positions them in between two hegemonic power structures.

The *victim* repertoire draws strongly from hegemonic discourses of colonialism and orientalism, and overlaps with the *white feminism* repertoire repeatedly:

> 38) Convincing white feminists that you are not oppressed and are not beaten daily for being female #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 39) White feminists constantly mocking/trying to save us instead of standing in solidarity with us. #lifeofamuslimfeminist

In tweet 38 the writer states that white feminists need "convincing" that Muslim women "are not oppressed and are not beaten daily for being female". With this comment, white feminism is described as ignorant and completely separate from the life of the writer. Both of the extracts above draw from the colonialist discourse where white people attempt to save the women of colonialized areas to promote their own ideologies or political goals. In extract 39, the writer states that white feminists are "constantly mocking" "us", constructing the victim repertoire where Muslim women are seen as incompatible with feminism. She also claims that white feminists are "trying to save us instead of standing in solidarity with us", this in turn draws from the colonialist discourse where West is aiming to 'improve' colonialized areas by implementing foreign values and ideologies on them. Both of the writers are adopting a position where they are taking a stance against the victim repertoire. The writer in extract 38 also adopts an apologetic position, where she needs to convince white feminists that her human rights are not being violated because of her gender. Tweet 39 also constructs the *victim* repertoire as lacking solidarity between white feminists and Muslim feminists, with "instead of standing in solidarity with us", while simultaneously constructing the position of Muslim feminists as unified and solidary.

Both the *victim* repertoire and *white feminism* repertoire construct separation from 'white feminists', not from men or Muslim community as in many of the other repertoires. These two repertoires actively construct the relations between

[145] El-Said & al 2015, 1, 233.

the two feminisms and while they both have a feminist agenda, Muslim feminists are hesitant to adopt a common position or even reject it completely. Forming their own position as a feminist also allows them to liberate from the package which often comes with Western ideologies. Constructing their feminist identity as compatible and a part of their Muslim identity the writers are renegotiating the concept of feminism.

Throughout the material the writers are positioning themselves between two powers "white feminists" and "Muslims". White feminism is seen as the other end of the spectrum while Muslim community is in the other. As seen above white feminism is constructed with an influence from powerful hegemonic discourses, and thus carries a lot of the power that has been given to the 'West' in these discourses. Muslim community on the other hand carries the power to influence and change the everyday lives of the writers and is often the object of critique. Positioning between these two powers the writers are constructing an *agency* repertoire:

> 40) Treacherously navigating between white fems turning their noses up at you & Muslims denying Islamic feminism exists #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 41) White fems want to pull your hijab off and 'liberate' you and Muslims tell you you don't need feminism #lifeofamuslimfeminist
>
> 42) White feminists and muslim men shit scared b/c our voices are louder than they ever dreamed. #oppressedmyass #lifeofamuslimfeminist

The *agency* repertoire presents the writers as a part of their own group which has been objectified by others, more specifically "white feminists" and other Muslims, and it constructs them as subjects and individual agents instead. In extract 40, the writer describes the relationship between white feminists, Muslims and Muslim feminists as "treacherously navigating". She claims that white feminists turn "their noses up at you" and that Muslim are "denying Islamic feminism exists". In extract 41 the emphasis is on white feminists wanting to "'liberate' you" and Muslims claiming that "you don't need feminism". In extract 42 the writer claims that both white feminists and Muslim men together are "shit scared" because Muslim feminists are gaining agency with "our voices are louder than they ever dreamed". The writer highlights her agency by using the "#oppressedmyass", which she effectively uses as a tool to refer to the essentialist notion and the Western white feminist assumption that Muslim women are oppressed. The comments under *agency* repertoire build the *white feminism* repertoire as well, by

describing ‘white feminists’ as disregarding or condescending towards Muslim feminists. Furthermore, it strengthens the separation between Muslim feminists and ‘other Muslims’ by constructing them as dismissing and controlling to feminist matters. The *agency* repertoire also builds the position of Muslim feminists between these two powers as tentative, but similarly ascending to obtain agency.

The *agency* repertoire rises from the position these writers are taking, which is highlighting their difference to the two hegemonic groups and thus resisting assimilation to it. This act which Bucholtz and Hall call *distinction*, is a strategy to claim power when an assumed social position holds no power to begin with. Here the writers’ cause might not be served by assimilating to white feminism, nor would it gain any influence by adapting to the assertive Muslim discourse where Islam has no need for feminism. Their feminism is then enabled by the separation to these two groups. By building the *agency* repertoire, they are forming an identity group which borrows power from white feminism and other Muslims but will not identify with either.

The last chart demonstrates how the repertoires and discourses that construct the writers’ feminist identities are situated:

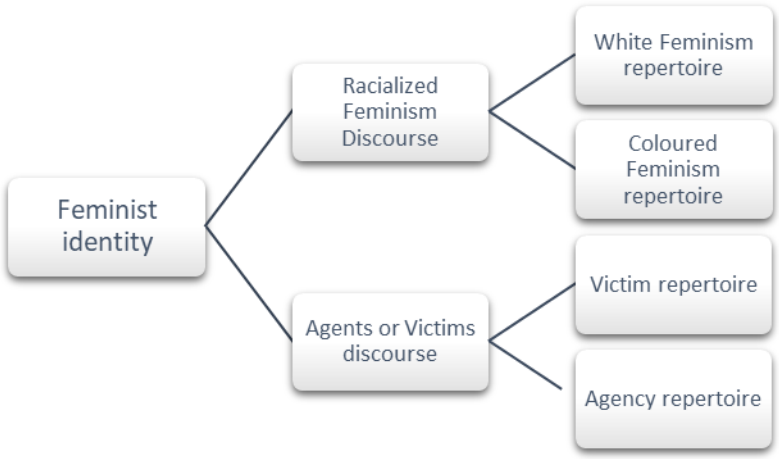

Chart 3. Feminist identity.

The repertoires that build the writers feminist identities are divided into two larger categories of *racialized feminism* and *agents and victims* discourse. The former entailing the repertoire of *white feminism* and *coloured feminism*, and the latter *victim* and *agency* repertoires. Differing from gender and Muslim repertoires the writers who construct the *white feminism* and *coloured feminism* repertoires rarely separate from “men”, but use labels like “white feminism” and “some Muslims”

to separate from instead. In *white feminism* their own unity is build with expressions like “us” and “our”, while they are taking a stance against the Western influence and white feminism. Then on the other hand in *coloured feminism* separation is constructed to “other Muslim women” and “feminist movement”, while the position of Black Muslim is used as a unifying concept. The *white feminism* repertoire enables the writers to construct their unified Muslim feminist identity as intersectional, whereas, the *coloured feminism* repertoire breaks that unity and supports an identity position of an outsider.

Agents and victims discourse is divided into two separate repertoires, *victim* repertoire and *agency* repertoire. In the *victim* repertoire the writers are positioning themselves strongly against “white feminists” and taking a stance against essentialist notions of Muslim women. *Agency* repertoire on the other hand enables the writers to claim power and they often use expressions like “our voices” emphasising the shared identity of Muslim feminists.

6. Locating the Theoretical Roots of Identity Forming

All aspects of the identity theory of Bucholtz and Hall are found in the data of this thesis. While the theoretical base of identity forming in their theory lies in the *emergence* principle, which sees it as a larger socio-cultural structure rather than an inherent psychological mechanism, that structure leans on the more particular ways of constructing identity. Throughout this thesis the emphasis has also been on the social construction of identities and the chosen theoretical and methodological tools all work to reinforce this. Where the theory of Bucholtz and Hall is pivotal, it is the more detailed ways the possible identities are constructed. Besides the more philosophical notion of emergence, their theory relies on four other principles, which all provide ways to interpret the construction of identities in layered ways.

Positionality is represented in the multiple ways that the writers locate themselves in macro-level categories such as women or adults, as well as smaller local cultural positions like Arab or Muslim, and finally in specific participant roles, such as a teacher or an equality promoter. Adopting different positions typically occurs simultaneously, which presents in the material for example adopting multiple positions at once such as a woman, a Muslim, a feminist, a wife

and a teacher. Furthermore, the smallest participant roles like the role of a teacher can be temporary and change fluidly when the discourses and repertoires shift, adding to the diverse nature of identities.

Emergence and *positionality* describe the philosophical foundations of identity forming where as the third principle of *indexicality* entails more specific mechanisms with which identities are build. *Indexicality* presents in the data in many ways: the writers are frequently appointing identity labels and positions to others such as 'sisters', 'brothers', 'Muslim', 'men', 'feminist' or 'white'. Positions the writers are appointing to themselves are such as "feminist", "Muslimah", "Muslim", "sister", "a woman", "wife", "niqabi", "black" and "woc". In addition to labelling the writers use occasional codeswitching by inserting Arabic expressions, which have strong Muslim connotations such as 'deen' or 'masjid' in to the comments. Another feature of *indexicality* is the act of stance taking, which is present to some extent in all of the tweets throughout the material. Stance is a position which the writer adopts after evaluating the subject and through that evaluation either aligning with or separating from it. As mentioned before, different stances reveal the writers' relationships and positions to other aspects in the conversation as well, like their stance on other groups. Stances taken in the material are mostly against essentialist assumptions on women, Muslim women or Muslim feminists. For example, they are taking a stance against the notion that Muslim women are wives above else, or that men can make decisions for women, or that female sexuality should be restricted for marriage. Stances are also taken against assumptions of Muslim feminists or women as less Muslim than men are, as well as against Western presumptions and the orientalist and colonialist discourses, which describe Muslim women as subjugated victims. Through the writers stance different repertoires are easily located, the ones which they align with, as well as the ones they oppose. Stance taking and other features of indexicality, like codeswitching and assigning identity labels are thus used as tools which point to the repertoires.

The fourth principle of Bucholtz's and Hall's identity theory, functions as one of the key concept in this material. *Relationality* has three major parts which have been discussed and named earlier in chapter 3, in this material it is most expressed through separation (or distinction) from another group. These groups are respectively 'Muslim men', 'other Muslims', 'white feminists' and on a larger scale the West and the Muslim community. Distinctions between Muslim women

appear in the veiling repertoire of *divergence* where criticism is received from women who wear the veil, where as distinction between Muslim feminists appears only in the *coloured feminism* repertoire. Similarity, or adequation as Bucholtz and Hall name it, is created while emphasising the similarity of the writers own group as 'Muslim women' or 'Muslim feminists' while downplaying the differences between individuals to form a unified identity group. Adequation and distinction thus function as one of the main principles of identity forming in the material.

Other aspects of *relationality* are evident in the material as well: authentication is present in codeswitching, where the writers draw legitimation for their Muslim identities from the original language of the Qur'an. But it also appears in the way the writers are constructing the repertoires of *Quranic rights*, *education* and *cultural Islam*. As they are constructing them they are drawing power from the Qur'an and from history which are both established sources of power. Denaturalization in turn occurs when the writers are breaking essentialist assumptions about Muslim women as quiet and passive, by actively taking stances against repressive repertoires and colonialist discourses. By being vocal and working as active agents in the conversation the writers are denaturalizing the myth of the Muslim woman.

Authorization and illegitimation appear in the material in the form of drawing power from institutionalized structures such as Islam to legitimize their identities as "real" Muslims. Identifying as feminists can also be seen as an act of authorization where the writers draw power and meaning from an established concept of 'feminism', while harnessing it to better suit their own goals. On the other hand, the strong opposition that 'white feminism' faces among the writers speaks of an illegitimation process, where the concept of feminism is sought to be stripped from Western hegemonic ideology to better suit the writers' goals.

Finally, the fifth and last principle of *partialness* provides a perspective to identity forming as a fractured process. Identity is situated and always affected by surrounding cultural and ideological discourses, but while it is constructed from outside, it is also consciously constructed by the speaker, which is why it is never a stable construction. In the context of this thesis all accounts of identity must also be considered as partial, all of them affected by different cultural structures and ideological processes in offline as well as online worlds. Thus, the constructed identities presented here are not to be thought of as permanent or fixed, but as

something that are being constantly remade and renegotiated as the discourses and repertoires that enable them change.

7. Conclusion and Reflections

7.1 Conclusions

The aim of this work has been to examine a vast Twitter corpus to find answers to the chosen research questions about the process of identity construction in the context of social media, religion and feminism. According to the data used here, the identities of Muslims feminists are constructed and also being constructed with multiple overlapping discourses and repertoires, with the help of numerous linguistic means.

In the analysis, I have used discourse analysis, discursive psychology and a socio-linguistic theory to locate nine discourses[146] and fifteen different interpretative repertoires from the material. The located repertoires construct the discourses as well as enable certain identity positions for the writers. The repertoires are named as follows: *women as homemakers, ideal woman, wife or whore, sexual inequality, sexuality as taboo, Quranic rights, education, cultural Islam, pious, diversion, divergence, white feminism, coloured feminism, victim* and *agency* – repertoires. These repertoires I have divided into three groups according to which identity category they primarily construct; gender – Muslim – feminist. Through the repertoires several different identity positions, on three different levels, are made possible for the writers. From larger social categories, to more specific cultural categories and finally temporary stances and participant roles, the writers are situating themselves in the conversation. Categorically the largest identity positions were a woman, a Muslim and a feminist. All of the writers positioned themselves in these categories, but in addition to these there were numerous possible positions adopted by the writers, either simultaneously or separately. The most used positions were a wife, an academic, an educated woman, an equality promoter, a free agent and a teacher. Some less used positions were a niqabi, a Black woman, a woc, a rape victim, a harassment victim and a divorcée.

[146] Gender differences, heterosexuality, natural, orientalist, colonialist, perfect Islam, veil, racialized feminism & agents or victims –discourse.

The repertoires and identity positions in the material construct an image of a Muslim feminist as separate from the essentialist image of Muslim women. The writers are constructing themselves as agents who are educated, opinionated and loud, against the Western image of quiet, oppressed and uneducated Muslim women. The strongest separations are done against the orientalist discourse that Muslim women are oppressed, but also against the gender and sexuality repertoires, where women and men have different roles and moral expectations. Throughout the material, the repertoires are constructing a strong unity and a mutual respect between Muslim feminists. This is seen especially in the veiling repertoires where despite the writers different stances on the veiling practise, they all share a unified opinion that it is fundamentally a personal question.

From all the repertoires, *coloured feminism* is the one that problematizes the writers shared Muslim feminist identity category the most. Racialization is creating a division and some writers use that to construct an outsider position which they adopt simultaneously with their Muslim and feminist positions. This shows how the identity positions can sometimes contradict each other and how adopting different identities will not necessary exclude others. To conclude, the analysis showed that the identity position of a Muslim feminist is quite heterogenic; all the identities of the writers are constructed from partial aspects. They are not constructed solely on cultural accounts, and religion is not seen as the only defining factor for the writers, although Muslim identity is adopted by all of them. I have aimed to study and show how the tweets build the identities of the writers from many different angles, and ultimately how they are being constructed with, and despite of, two very powerful concepts of West and Islam.

7.2 Reflections and Future Studies

As described in the introduction, the otherness of Muslim women and Muslim feminists is affecting the Western feminist conversation as well. Personally, I hope that in the future more work would be published in this area of research since the length of a Master's thesis in nowhere near enough to elaborate the complex history of gender questions in Islam or the contemporary identity positions of a Muslim feminists.

Biggest challenges writing this thesis have been the form of Twitter material and the enormous field of studies in which the work locates. Organizing and locating repertoires from a conversation which is limited to short individual

messages is far more challenging than locating them from an interview transcript. The unique and popular form of communicating in Twitter demands a profound knowledge of the context from which the messages rise. For the researcher this means long periods of time spend familiarizing themselves with the historical and contemporary studies. Furthermore, identity formation and discourse analysis comprise their own theoretical challenges as the information they offer is so diverse and there is no established consensus in either. The answer for keeping a focus in the work has been to choose a theoretical foundation, which parts complement each other, and strictly following the guidelines that they offer. More in depth analysis on each of the identity positions and repertoires could be done following the same theoretical guidelines, but the aim here was to offer a more general understanding of what aspects there are to the identities of Muslim feminists.

This work engages in a larger question of gender equality and social justice, but due to its interdisciplinary nature it could be considered in many other frameworks as well. The material has presented an endless source of research possibilities, partly because studies of Muslim feminists are sparse. Ultimately this work could function and be developed in the study of religions in at least two research contexts: firstly one could consider that with the influence of social media, networking and religious or ideological activism are becoming possible for women globally. How does this modernity as we see it, connect with Islam and how do Muslim women and feminists negotiate their religious identities in the globalising world?

Secondly, another question that could be presented to this work is how does the diversity of Islam present here? The writers refuse to adopt traditional or essentialist roles on many levels, but still religion is very much a part of their identities. The importance of Islam is rarely questioned and throughout the data it appears as an adopted identity position by all the writers. What is evident in the material is that the ways of 'being Muslim' are diverse and that the essentialist idea of a unified Muslim identity, which all Muslims share, is proven false. The writers are constructing an Islam which relies on same repertoires, allowing them to form their own truth about what is "real Islam" and thus position themselves as a Muslim. From an academic point of view, no form of Islam is more real than any other, and the way the writers are constructing their Islam brings forth yet another way of interpreting it for the needs of an individual or a group. The

discourse of *perfect Islam* and the repertoires that construct it describe well the problem which often weighs on Western discussion concerning Islam as one religion. Labelling Islam as a religion of peace or a religion of terrorism for example, is reducing the diversity of Islam. From an academic point of view it can be both or yet neither, and as seen in this analysis Islam is what it is socially constructed to be. Through discourses and repertoires the writers here and Muslims in general, are building an Islam which suits their sense of justice and their own cause. These interpretations are not more or less "real" or "true" than any other interpretation of Islam, but through different contexts the validity of the repertoire alters. Furthermore, this opens the question of governance in Islam, and who decides which of these interpretations are considered as factual accounts?

In addition to questioning and challenging cultural, religious and gender based essentialism, it is important to remember that while it may be convenient to dismiss the stereotypes of women and Islam as faulty views, these established essentialist notions are nonetheless affecting everyday lives of people. While interacting with others people categorise them using these essentialist labels, such as "man" or "woman", "white" or "black", "Muslim" or "Christian" and through these categorisations they choose how to interact with others. Additionally, like the analysis here demonstrates, this type of labelling affects the way people see themselves and how others see them, and it is a fundamental part of identity construction through othering.

I have tried to avoid the colonialist and orientalist discourses and thus this work is not aimed at 'giving a voice' to Muslim feminists or to 'empower' the women in Islam, but to discuss the different repertoires in which the identity positions of Muslim feminists are build. While the material in this thesis shows that there are some specific equality questions that the writers face, they are not for the Western researchers or feminists to 'fix'. Instead, and where I believe the value of this sort of analysis lies, the objective should be to break the silence of Western research on Muslim feminists as agents themselves and aim to demonstrate the diversity of their voices.

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